

Vincentian Meeting

**OUR APOSTOLATE
IN THE
MOSLEM WORLD**

Fatqua (Liban)
26 July - 2 August 1999

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

CRONICHE OF THE MEETING

*By Ignacio Fernández Mendoza, C.M.
Vicar General*

The gathering took place from July 26th until August 6, 1999 in the residence of Our Lady of the Mountain, situated in Fatqa, on top of a hill that has an altitude of 450 meters, 25 Kilometers to the north of Beirut. From this mountain top, one can appreciate the beautiful view of the sea coast and the growing urban expansion that could be seen to the north of the capital of this country.

A total of 104 persons participated. Fifty four stayed at the Our Lady of the Mountain Hospitality Center and 50 attended the sessions while living elsewhere.. Fifty Vincentian missionaries, 42 Daughters of Charity and 12 Vincentian Lay people participated in the gathering. Present at the gathering were 13 C.M. Provinces plus the general curia of the C.M. as well as Daughters of Charity from the Motherhouse and 18 Provinces and Regions. The Missionaries came from some 17 countries, while the Daughters of Charity from 18 and the Vincentian Laity were from Lebanon. A Patriarch, His Beatitude Stephanos Gathas, C.M., three Visitors, Fathers G. Bou Jaoudé, F. Kangler, and M. Ginete, and Sister Eva Saad, Visitatrix of the Province of the Middle East. The Superior General was represented by Fathers Ignacio Fernández Mendoza, Vicar General and Victor Bieler, Assistant for the Missions.

For special reasons and taking into account some suggestions from various Provinces and some individual confreres, the Superior General and his council chose to convoke a gathering dedicated to Islam. At first, the thought was that only the Vincentian confreres would participate. Later, the need was discovered to open the doors to the Daughters of Charity and also to include the Lay Vincentians. A committee composed of Fathers Victor Bieler, George Bou Jaoudé, Franz Kangler, Roberto Lovera, and Jean Landousies, were given the mandate to prepare and convoke the Gathering.

During the 24th and 25th of July, Saturday and Sunday, various Vincentian missionaries and Daughters arrived in Beirut and were received into their respective Provincial Houses of the Vincentians and Daughters. July 25th, in the morning, a considerable group of confreres concelebrated the Eucharist in the Provincial House of the Daughters of Charity. Fr. Naoum Atallah, C.M. was the president. In the evening of that same day, with the arrival of almost all of the participants in Beirut, we traveled by bus to the Welcome Center, which is the property of the Marinate Sisters of the Holy Family. The Center is a modern and spacious building, fully equipped for this type of gathering.

On the 26th, we began the sessions as planned. Father Ignacio Fernández Mendoza was the principal concelebrant. Father Ignacio, in his homily spoke of Saints

Joachim and Ann, saints of the day, and he asked that all the participants consider the Gathering on Islam as a time for personal formation. The fact is that believers of various religions have to live together on this planet. As Christians, we cannot be content to simply live shoulder to shoulder with the Moslems. Today, reflection and study are indispensable to interpret adequately religious pluralism and to act in accordance with our Christian faith and live together with believing Moslems in a spirit of freedom and mutual respect.

Once gathered in the meeting room, Father George Bou Jaoudé, Visitor of the Province of the East, gave the welcoming address to the participants of the Gathering. He mentioned that all the participants live in direct or indirect relationship with Islam. He invited all the participants to take into account this reality. In Lebanon, he noted, there are three religions that believe in one God, Christians, Moslems and Jews. Normally they have lived in harmony, but there have been times of misunderstandings and even conflict. At this present time, the current law of Lebanon recognizes 18 religious entities, all of them represented in the National Parliament. The dialogue between Christians and Moslems began many centuries ago. It has been a dialogue of daily life and contact among persons of various cultures and religions. Christians give testimony of their faith while living on this earth in the midst of the Moslem world. Bishop Antonio Maria Veglio, Papal Nuncio spoke words of greeting to the participants. He considered very important this Gathering of the Vincentian Family, organized to reflect on the relation between Christians and Moslems.

The first conference was given by Georges Massouh, an orthodox priest, who, taking into account that the great majority of the participants in the gathering knew only superficially the complex reality of the Moslem world, offered a global vision of Islam. He highlighted the historic figure of Mohammed, the origins of the Koran and its relationship to certain biblical personages, the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity, the existence of groups within Islam and finally, the beliefs and religious practices of the Moslems. The conference provoked many questions and answers.

On that afternoon and the following second day, father Hans Voking was scheduled to give a dissertation on the different ideas in contemporary Islam and on the missionary commitment of Islam. However, this session was not realized because the speaker did not travel to Lebanon. The 26th, in the afternoon, Fathers G. Bou Jaoudé, V. Bieler, y R. Lovera occupied the podium. The Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity, organized in groups according to places where they presently work, dedicated two sessions to present to the participants some personal data, the ministries they are involved in and their pastoral relation to the Moslems. The representatives of the various countries participated in the following order: Algiers, Tunis, Morocco, Indonesia, Philippines, Austria-Turkey, Lebanon, Belgium, Spain, France, England, Italy-Albania, Eslovania, Mozambique and Cameroon. In general, the Daughters of Charity are involved in social services and "hands on" promotion of the poor. The Vincentian Missionaries are involved more frequently in learning centers open to Christians and Moslems. It was brought out that the Moslem

population in Europe is more numerous now. The local churches have to take seriously this new challenge to respond pastorally to this reality that is affecting all Europe at the end of this millennium and the beginning of the new millennium. We must mention in this report the valuable presence of the Vincentian Province of Austria. Seven confreres participated, among them was Father F. Kangler, who ordinarily resides in Istanbul.

Brother D.A., C.M. gave an account of his encounter with Christianity. He related one by one the steps which led him to faith in Jesus Christ. His path was full of many difficulties. Deacon Ch. K also gave public testimony of his motives for embracing Christianity and later entering the Congregation of the Mission. In both cases, the good example of certain persons were the reasons for their entering the Christian faith.

It was a sunny day on the 27th. The gathering had begun generating much interest. Some more, some less, but all were interested in listening to today's presentations on the relation between Islam and Christianity.

Mr. Hisham Nashabe presented a brilliant conference entitled: "Testimony of a Believing Moslem Concerning his Own Faith and His Vision of Christianity". He expressed his personal relationship with the Christian faith since his early childhood. He frequented learning centers run by Catholics and also by Protestants. His own father being a Moslem, taught him to respect and appreciate the positive values of Christianity. During the conference, he pointed out the basic tenets of the Moslem faith, the relation of the Koran with Christianity, mutual similarities and differences, the agreeable attitudes of the Christians and Moslems in order to live together; namely: tolerance, respect, daily collaboration, and finally, a decisive interest in a clear ethic and the achieving of peace. The dialogue that continued after the conference was characterized for its clarity, its frankness, and even in some questions for its daring boldness. The questions direct toward the speaker focused on some hot issues such as: the relations between Christians and Moslems, how to understand tolerance and religious liberty, possible conversions, state religion, fundamentalism, the status of the woman in Islam, and the rights of all people. Some questions were asked about revelation and mission such as they are understood in Islam. Many doctrinal and practical themes of Islam were clarified. Of particular interest was the vision that a believing and practicing Moslem has of Christianity. The doctrinal contents of Islam and Christianity at times did not identify with the historical realities. At various times, economic and political interests have obscured the truth of Islam and Christianity. The religion of love, Christianity, at times has manifested itself as a religion of violence.

Fr. Jean Landousies, C.M. in the first session of the afternoon offered an excellent synthesis of Islam. He referred to: the three modalities of present Islam-Popular Islam, Radical Islam and Modern Islam; the different readings of the Koran-traditional, scientific, and political; the presence of Moslems in Europe and its missionary dimension on European soil. He made reference also to the challenges that

Islam has to confront right now- fidelity to the past and modern times; revelation and religious liberty; concept of one God and the Theocratic state. As usual, in the dialogue following the conference, many questions threw much light on the subject.

Many religious dignitaries came to the place of the gathering to give their support. His Beatitude Stephanos II Ghattas, C.M., Patriarch of Alexandria for the Coptic Catholics, was present in the gathering from the beginning until the end. Bishop Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem was also present., as well as Bishop Paul Bassim, Apostolic Vicar for the Latin Rite in Lebanon. He arrived on July 27th to greet the participants. Their presence showed the importance of the topic that was being discussed.

July 28th began with the concelebrated Eucharist presided by Fr. Manuel Ginete, Visitor of the Philippines. The liturgical songs in the liturgy was another manifestation of the international flavor of this gathering.

Fr. Yves Danjou gave a conference on St. Vincent and Islam. He alluded to the situation of the Moslems in the time of Saint Vincent with relation to Europe and the politics followed by the European countries with relation to the Moslem world. In particular, he referred to the missionary initiatives of Saint Vincent. The presenter corroborated his own point of view with various Vincentian texts. The missionary project of St. Vincent with regard to Moslems was the same as Jesus Christ: act first and teach later.

During the rest of the morning on the 28th, and the two sessions of the afternoon, Missionaries and Daughters of Charity presented their pastoral activities that they carry out in relation to the Moslems. For reasons of brevity, allow me to simply name and comment briefly on the groups that made presentations. The Province of the East of the Daughters of Charity, which consists of Lebaon, Siria, Iran, Palestine, and Egypt. In general, the Daughters of Charity concentrate their activities in social assistance, education, health, and feminine promotion. The political and social circumstances as well as freedom vary quite a bit in all the countries mentioned.

The Daughters of Charity of the Province of North Africa are present in Tunis, Algiers, and Mauritania. In Algiers there is a community of C.M. missionaries. Although geographically close to one another, each of the three countries has its own flavor and culture. Tunis has a western culture, while Algiers faces the battle between fidelity to the past and dialogue with modern times. Mauritania is affected by the extreme poverty within the life of its country. Taking into account the deep rootedness of Islam and the minority presence of the Church, the Daughters of Charity have opted, in pastoral practice, for a path that passes through simple relationship with the poor, for patient presence and witness, for the exercise of disinterested charity and for discretion, far from any ostentation. In this way the encounter with Islam remains favorable, while awaiting what the Lord has foreseen in his divine providence.

The Sisters coming from the European countries of England, France and Spain also gave witness. Islam has entered the doors of Europe and is already found in our midst. They strongly alluded to the difficulties of all kind which the Muslims encounter at the time of adapting to the European culture and society.

The Daughters of Charity offer much material help. The Daughters of Austria maintain strong pastoral relations with Islam. Our Austrian confreres, through their concern for the Moslems in Austria, and through their educational ministry in Istanbul, find themselves at the top of the list of Vincentian European Provinces in regard to this pastoral relationship with the Moslems.

July 29th, according to the program, the participants in the gathering left for certain places that had special significance in Lebanon. The day offered two complimentary possibilities: the tourist part and the academic part. The latter consisted in making contact with the Christian and Moslem realities of the country. In the morning, the group crossed Beirut and climbed the mountain range that separates the capital from the interior valley, visited ruins of Baalbek in the valley of Bekaa, situated between the mountain range of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon. The highest point of Lebanon is Mord at 3,087 meters high. The highest point of Anti-Lebanon is Hermon, which reaches an altitude of 2,900 meters, forming the frontier to the south of the country between Lebanon, Syria and Palestine.

We had a meeting with Bishop Boulos Mounded El Aachem, Maronite Bishop of Baalbeck and Deir-el-Ahma and president of the Episcopal Commission for Dialogue with Islam, in representation of the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops of Lebanon (APECL). Ulema Cheith Khalil Shoucoir of Baalbek and of Bekaa participated in the meeting. Both the Bishop and the Ulema expressed their own points of view with regard to the relation between Christians and Moslems. Afterwards, they responded to the questions asked by many. The meeting had a high ecumenical value. At this moment, the representatives of the two communities, Christians and Moslems, make a great effort at mutual understanding and peace.

The meal took place in a restaurant in Ainata, in the open air and very near the spring which bears the same name. It is the source of the fresh and abundant waters which make fruitful on a large scale the fertile lands of the Bekaa. The diners appreciated the beauty of the place and took the opportunity to share the typical food of the country in a climate of happiness and joy. In the afternoon the group went back to Fatqa, passing again the summit of the mountain chain of Lebanon, to visit the Valley of the Saints, where the Maronite community established itself in olden times and where, up to this day, many monasteries continue to radiate spiritual life.

In the afternoon, the group returned to Fatqa, and later visited the "Valley of the Saints" in which the Maronite community had been established in the past and where still the monasteries continue to radiate their spiritual life.

On July 30th, Fr. Samir Khalil, S.J., a professor at the St. Joseph University in

Beirut and at the Easter Institute of Rome, spoke in the two morning sessions about an important theme. He spoke about: Monotheism and Trinity: God and man in Christianity and Islam, and its implications in society. He divided his presentation in two parts: the vision of God and the consequences in the society, family, politics, and culture. The Jews, Moslems and Christians adore the one and only God, creator. However the presentation of God differs in each one of the three monotheistic groups. The three groups maintain some kind of relation with the Bible, even though the conclusions are divergent for the most part. The speaker presented the vision of God proper to Jews, Christians and Moslems. The Moslems manifest that their religion is simple while Christianity is very complicated. He gave special importance to the necessity of interpreting again the mysteries of our faith, starting with the presentation of God as love and interpreting the Trinity, creation, and redemption. At the conclusion of his conference, the speaker gave answers to the questions: What do the Moslems mean when they say that Islam is a perfect religion? What influence has Christianity had in the Koran? How do the Moslems understand revelation? Is dialogue between Christianity and Islam possible?

In the second part, Fr. Samir referred to the political consequences that come from the vision of God in Christianity and Islam. He alluded to the concepts of the human person, family, freedom, democracy, tolerance, and sin. From the Trinitarian vision of God flows the diverse interpretations with regard to the behavior in the practical life of Christians as well as Moslems. Finally, in the second part, the speaker focused his attention on the consequences for Christians and Moslems the presence of 20 million Moslems in Europe. Both religions will benefit if the European Christians achieve the values of modern life, without leaving behind their own Christian identity.

In the two afternoon sessions, the representatives of various countries, confreres, sisters and laity, gave presentations on the pastoral activities that they realize in their respective countries highlighting of course their relationship with the Moslems. A Vincentian layperson from Lebanon spoke first. The affiliates value their Vincentian spirituality, permanent formation, mission apostolate and personal testimony which are of major importance in the presence of the Moslems. Fr. Kangler gave information about the ministries of the Vincentian Family in Istanbul: Saint George High School and Peace Hospital. We also heard reports about Albania, and especially about the work of the Daughters of Charity of the Province of Turin. Fr. Luigi Cannato spoke about the Vincentian mission in Preshen, which pertains to the Province of Naples and in part to the provinces of Turin and Rome. The reports continued with Daughters and Confreres from Indonesia, Daughters from Eritrea, Fr. Manuel Velo from Mozambique, Daughters from the Philippines and Italy. At the end of this session, a representative from the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Lebanon described the charitable activities of the laity and their relation to Islam. Fr. Fady Basil from Province of the Mid East spoke about the "Journee Romaines Movement" which foments dialogue between Christians and Moslems. In general, all the reports referred to the historical and social situation of Christians and Moslems in the respective countries. Many questions were asked and in a charitable dialogue, much light was thrown on the inter-religious topic.

The 31st of July, Fr. Emilio Platti, O.P. gave a conference entitled: "Inspiration and revelation in the Bible and Koran". The Koran incorporated many elements of the Biblical Tradition. Mohammed was born and grew up in the middle of a multi religious environment influenced by Jewish and Christian currents. From an accumulation of intertwined doctrines, he arrived to formulate with clarity, some conclusions related to one God, eschatology, prophetism, justice, solidarity and commandments which proceed in a certain way from the biblical message. These mandates manifest without a doubt, the will of God.

Fr. Platti continued with a presentation of these mandates, especially, those of the Koran considered valid in all times and places. Islam keeps a close relation with Judaism because of the frequent mention of the Biblical Patriarchs in the Koran. Finally, the Koran will end up looking at itself and rejecting all relation with the Torah. The Koran, with all its contents, comes down directly from God without the need of human intervention. Removing all possible intervention between God and man, the Koran distances itself from Christianity given that in the Koran, the mission of Jesus is a little less than anecdotal. All the allusions to Jesus' divine sonship, his role as mediator and redeemer are lacking.

The 31st in the afternoon we visited the caves of Delta. Situated a short distance from Beirut. We were impressed by this cave, one of the wonders of the world. After the visit, we proceeded to the shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon. This shrine is today one of the focal points of Christianity. Each year, thousands of Christians and Moslems go there to venerate the Virgin Mary. His Beatitude, Stephanos II Ghattas, C.M. presided at the concelebrated liturgy. In his homily he spoke of the missionary vocation of Saint Justin de Jacobis which was being celebrated this very day, July 31st in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The calendar indicated the start of the month of August. Early on the first day, Sunday, after the Eucharist, the participants went to the south of Lebanon. From the bus windows, we could appreciate the view of the Mediterranean Coast and an uninterrupted succession of cities with their old and new buildings. Lebanon has quickly recovered from the destruction caused by the last war. We stopped in the ancient city of Sidon. Different cultures and people have left their mark here, especially the Phoenicians, Crusades and Arabs. The gospel puts Jesus here during one of his stays in a foreign land.

The second place visited was the shrine of Our Lady of Maghdouche, situated on a hill top from which one can see the city of Sidon and among other sights, a camp of Palestinian refugees. This is the second shrine that the Lebanese Christians frequently visit. Having sung the Salve Regina and having prayed to the Virgin for peace in Lebanon, we continued on our journey toward Tyre. This city is located at the southern coast of the Lebanese territory, near the Israeli frontier. We observed the roman and Byzantine ruins. Unfortunately, this area still suffers the tensions of war. We could hear the bombs going off inside of the territory of Lebanon. We had lunch

at Mounes Hotel Restaurant where we watched a presentation of the folklore of the region. A group of youth presented traditional music and typical dance.

The next stop was to have a meeting in Chark Saida with Sélin Ghazal of the Greek-Catholic church, superior general of the Salvatorians and member of the Episcopal Commission for dialogue with Moslems. Fouad Saad, local leader in charge of the Sunite Moslems, also participated in this meeting. Both put forward their interest and what they are doing to bring about peace and respect between Christians and Moslems. They emphasized the need for understanding among all. We left this meeting happily surprised at the ecumenical understanding that is being reached between the leaders of Christians and Moslems.

August 2nd, we moved on to the second part of the gathering. In the meetings, we could sense the revitalization of our Vincentian ministry within the Moslem world. It intended to help us become more creative in our ministry which puts us in contact with Islam. It pretended to give a new thrust to the mission and to the social services for the poor.

Fr. Khaled Alkasheh, Jordanian by birth, member of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue spoke in the first session of the morning about the Theology of Inter-religious Dialogue. He began by congratulating the Vincentian Family for having convoked this gathering. He affirmed that it is important to know the theological basis for inter-religious dialogue. Religious plurality, marked by globalization has given rise to a huge crisis in all the world. Hence, there is a need for the church to set the inter-religious dialogue on firm bases. How can we evaluate the theological contents of various religions? What is the starting point for a catholic who wants to establish contact with other religions? Here are some points to take into account: There is only one God and Creator. Human beings, created in the image of God, have the possibility of entering into contact with God. The ultimate horizon of all human beings is God. Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and all people. His death and resurrection is situated in the middle of all paths of humanity. The church has received the mandate to proclaim Jesus Christ to all so that all believing people will arrive to eternal life.

The speaker referred also to the salvific value of all religions. As bearers of such values, we have to affirm that the fullness of truth is found in the revelation whose presenter is Jesus Christ. Prayer is the way to enter into constructive dialogue among all religions. Through prayer, we enter into contact with God and at the same time, we find ourselves in an environment of listening and encounter with those who profess a creed different than ours. Among the questions directed to the speaker were doctrinal and practical problems which directly affect dialogue with Muslims.

Later, Fr. Khaled offered questions for group discussion and plenary session. There were three questions: Is it necessary to develop the theological reflection among religions in order to activate a true dialogue with Moslems? What is the relationship between theology and spirituality of dialogue? Is it possible to individualize some

elements of Vincentian spirituality that facilitates dialogue with the Moslems? These questions animated much reflection and group discussion. Inter-religious dialogue is a demand derived from the paternity of God. The Vincentian Spirituality have elements that facilitate inter-religious dialogue: the five virtues, the sense of Divine Providence, and spiritual poverty.

In the second and last session of the afternoon, Fr. Khaled Akasheh informed all about the purpose and activities of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. He referred especially to contact with the Moslems. There are more meetings with them. It is better to move slowly but with a firm base. Mutual knowledge and friendship is growing day by day. Dialogue has built bridges between the Moslems of the Mid East and North of Africa without forgetting the Moslems of the United States and Europe. He ended by saying that dialogue with Moslems is difficult but necessary.

On August 2nd, in the afternoon, we went to St. Joseph's College in Antoura which has 4,000 students in the primary and secondary schools. After visiting the site, we joined the confreres on the terrace for the supper they has so carefully prepared. In this chronicle we want to express our gratitude for their fraternal welcome.

On the 3rd of August, the reflection centered around the concrete pastoral commitments relating to the Moslems. What to do here and now? How to act in the midst of the Moslem world? His Beatitude Stephanos II Ghattas, C.M., manifested his joy at having participated in the gathering. He affirmed that he has never abandoned St. Vincent as his preferred saint and to feel part of the Vincentian Family. He proposed various preliminary observations. In the Mid-East, the Moslems adopt two divergent attitudes: the fundamentalist and the law. The first has as its end the establishment of a Moslem state ruled by Islamic law. The second promotes nationalism, relegating to a second place religious motivations. Both strains are involved in mutual battle. On the other side, the division among Christians inhibits for the most part the dialogue with brother Moslems. That is why union of the Churchs is urgent in order to avoid permanent scandal in front of Islam. The Catholic Church, continued the Patriarch, should continue to take responsibility for the various developmental works: education, culture, health and social development. A climate of fraternal communion with the Muslims is created through these works, open to all without distinction. At present, the Church of the Middle East needs Christian leaders in the area of culture, priests who are well trained and a renewed pastoral program. It should be the concern of all the Christians of these local churches to be the light and salt in the midst of a Muslim world. The works of service to the poor are very important in this part of the world. The civilization of love should be put into effect in concrete works. It is necessary, moreover, to renew on the part of Christians the sense of belonging to these nations of the Middle East, in which Providence had placed them and where it is their duty to give continuously a true witness of faith in Jesus Christ, while awaiting for the coming of the Lord.

Fr. Antopnius Abrimantrono, C.M., described n great detail the historical and

present situation of Indonesia, especially the relation between the Moslem majority and the Christians. In spite of the recent incidences in the last couple of years, the dialogue continues in two directions, academic and through daily life.

Fr. Landousies, C.M. formulated various questions for the groups to discuss. Given what we have heard in this encounter, What do you consider to be the most important for you as a missionary in the midst of the Moslem world? Do you think it is necessary to direct to the Superior General of the double Family some suggestions in reference to the mission in general and the formation?

Fr. Khaled Akasheh enumerate the church documents dealing with relations with other religions, especially the Moslems. Among the Conciliar documents cited, he made reference to: *Nostra Aetate*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes*. Among the Encyclicals, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Veritatis Splendor*, and *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*.

According to the calendar, it was already August 4. The meeting was almost over. We had only one morning to drawing some conclusions in regard to the academic portion and the practical business.

His Beatitude Stephanos II Ghattas presided at the concelebrated Eucharist in the rite of Saint Basil in use among the Coptic Catholics. It is a liturgical rite rich in prayers and in the use of symbols. To those of us who belong to the Roman Rite, which is stereotyped nowadays, we were pleasantly surprised by the frequent interchange of prayers among the main celebrant, the deacon and the people.

During the morning session, the secretary of each one of the six groups read to the assembly the conclusions and suggestions of the previous afternoon's meeting. The conclusions, and suggestions referred to four areas. All the groups commented about the positive results of the meeting and considered it a moment of grace. Despite the difficulties in opening dialogue with the Moslems, the group has decided to follow with discretion, patience and a high sense of Christian gratitude praying for the Moslems and appreciating their positive values. The suggestions referred to the future of the Vincentian presence in the Moslem world and in particular, the missionary activity and social service orientation. Finally, the groups asked that they continue to receive information and formation about Islam. It was suggested that the conclusions and suggestions be drawn up and published in a future edition of *Vincentiana*.

The gathering ended with a brief allocution from the Vicar General, who, in the name of the Superior General, thanked the members of the commission in charge of organizing and conducting the gathering, the team of translators and all present. In my name, in the name of all the participants, we want to express our sincere thanks to the Vincentian Missionaries of the Province of the East, in particular to Fr. Bou Jaoudé, Provincial, and to the Daughters of Charity, for their warm hospitality. We send our thanks also to the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family and their colleagues.

August 5th was spent in contact with the reality of the country and in particular of the local church. Early in the morning, all went to the residence of the Maronite Patriarch and Cardinal, His Blessedness J. Sfeir. The Patriarch presided at the Eucharist celebrated in the Maronite rite. In his homily, he highlighted the historical reality of the church in this country, and in particular in the Valley of the Saints, populated since ancient times by monks, penitents and saints. In this place, the spirituality of the Maronite Church developed based on the following of Jesus Christ, the way of the cross and resurrection. From this place, the Christian continue to give testimony of their faith in front of those of other beliefs. The participants listened to an extensive presentation of the actual political, social and religious situation of Lebanon. Time passed and there were still many places to visit. Following the plan of the organizers, we went to the hills where the famous cedars of Lebanon grow. We feasted with a delicious meal prepared by the Daughters of Charity and finally, visited the Monastery of St. Anthony, one of the proponents of monastic life in the valley of the Saints.

I want to make clear the shared opinions of all the participants of this grand event before we leave for our respective homes. All were very satisfied with the academic content, the impeccable organization, and with the way the gathering was conducted from beginning to end. Christians and Moslems live together in many places in the world. We must recognize and value this reality as we face the new millennium. Those of us who have participated in this gathering now have a new sensitivity to the apostolate in the midst of the Moslem world. Praised be God.

(ARTHUR KOLINSKY, C.M., translator)

Homily at the Opening Mass

by Ignacio Fernandez Mendoza, C.M.
Vicar General

Dear brothers and sisters:

Blessed be Jesus Christ now and forever. Blessed be His Holy Name above all now at this meeting about Islam that we begin today. We are now together to live a deep period of Vincentian communion. Those of us that are present today come from different countries and cultures. However, among us there is a fundamental circumstance: we are all followers of Jesus in the same manner of Saint Vincent de Paul. We are members of Saint Vincent family and as such we are to proceed during the next journey. During these days of togetherness we are going to share: group study and dialogue and the mutual communication of experiences concerning our personal and community relationship with Islam. We are going to share liturgical celebrations and the time dedicated to community prayer. We are also going to have the opportunity to know this country, Lebanon, where the Vincentian family has been present for many years. Finally, we are going to accept the hospitality that the Vincentian brothers and sisters as well as those responsible for this house offer us. As of now we assure them our sincere gratitude.

The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles upon narrating matters concerning the appearances of the resurrected Christ and the early period of the Church point out the moment and the place when the event occurred. We are meeting in a country that was very lucky to listen very early to the news of the Gospel. On this land, Lebanon, the message of Jesus was heard soon after the death and resurrection of the Lord. Jesus had said to the Apostles: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth.” (Act 1,8).

We are immensely lucky to be able to celebrate the Eucharist on this Lebanese land where the first Christian communities met, just as we do today, to pray together, listen to the word of God and share the bread.

Today we celebrate the memory of St. Joachim and St. Anne, the Virgin Mary’s parents. There is nothing so appropriate than to apply to both saints the words taken from the Ecclesiastes. St. Joaquim and St. Anne were two “persons of good will”. The Lord God had announced to his people the coming of the Messiah. St. Joachim and St. Anne were live instruments used by the Lord to make the ancient promise a reality. Through them a daughter was given who was to be the

Mother of Jesus. The collective prayer contains this thought: “Lord, you gave St. Joachim and St. Anne the grace to bring to this world the Mother of your Son”. St. Joachim and St. Anne were two indicators placed by God on the road to show humanity the proximity and the fact of the Incarnation of the Son of God. For this reason this assembly gives thanks to God and gathers under the intersection of these saints. Again we borrow the words from the collective prayer. “Give us oh Lord through the prayers of these saints the salvation that you have promised your people”. Salvation that in effect became a reality by means of St. Joachim and St. Anne and their daughter the Blessed Virgin Mary. Salvation that Jesus the Christ and the Messiah brought to us in person.

In the following days we are going to reflect together on the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Helped by experienced persons we are going to try to know as best as possible what concerns Islam and at the same time we will try to outline the most adequate methods to announce the Gospel in the midst of the Muslim world. I invite you to actively participate in this journey. Each time the places where we Christians have to coexist with men and women of different beliefs are more numerous. The majority of those of us present here, for one reason or another, are in touch with Muslim believers. On the other hand, our frequent relationship with Islam and other beliefs has to be accompanied by reflection and clarification of concepts. It is not enough the physical proximity and the simple coexistence with one another, of Christians with Muslims. Today it is essential to study in order to act with wisdom when the time comes to interpret religious pluralism, to act with coherence with our Christian faith and to coexist with persons from other beliefs in a climate of freedom and mutual respect. Vatican Council II in its Declaration *Nostra Aetate* subscribed to these words: “The sacred Council exhorts all who forgetting the past, try sincerely a mutual understanding, defending and promoting together social justice, moral good, peace and freedom for all men” (NA 3)

Lord, we ask you that this journey enrich those who have come from near and far away places. May this meeting about Islam be a favorable time for a better understanding of our Muslim brothers. May it also be a time of prayer, study, reflection, dialogue and, finally, a healthy coexistence in fraternal communion.

This Eucharist reminds us and brings to the present the Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Together with the offering that the Lord makes of Himself to the Father, we offer Him the time of this Encounter that begins today.

(JAMES G. WARD, C.M., translator)

“Don’t be afraid of those who kill the body” (Luke 12: 4)

Homily of H. B. the Patriarch Card. Sfeir

We read today in our liturgy this verse of the Gospel, which I just proclaimed: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body." This verse, I dare say, is the guide for the spirituality of the Maronite Church. It is the spirit of this verse that has led you too on the paths of the mission in the countries where the authority of your Congregation and your apostolic zeal took you.

Before reflecting on the meaning of this verse, and particularly on the spirit that it inspires in those who want to practice it, I would like to welcome respectfully my venerable brother in the Patriarchate, His Beatitude Patriarch Stephanos Ghattas, Patriarch of Alexandria for the Catholic Copts. I would like also to welcome you all, Fathers and Sisters, into our country, this country that is characterized by what we call, the Islam-Christian conviviality. I understand that your mission takes place in countries, like ours, where you live in daily contact with Islam. In Lebanon, I do not think that you feel ill at ease, even though you come from different regions of the world, and although you are of different nationalities. I also want to thank you for taking the trouble of coming to this Patriarchal residence which my predecessors chose to build in this region, which may be considered as the cradle of the Maronite Church. Because it is here where our Church was born, and became a Hierarchy with its first Patriarch Saint John Maron, elected in 686.

Let us go back to the Maronite spirituality. It would be easy to understand if you took a look at this Holy Valley. Some authors say that at the beginning of Christianity, it was inhabited by hundreds of hermits who led a life of sacrifice and abnegation in almost inaccessible caves. It took root in this valley. That is why, during the persecution periods, the Maronite patriarchs chose to live in this valley. They remained here for four centuries. About 20 Patriarchs are buried here.

This is in fact a spirituality of deprivation, mortification, renouncing of the self, disdain of the body, prayer and fasting. Saint Charbel, born in a nearby village, Blessed Hardini, who was recently beatified, and Blessed Rafka all led this kind of life. They crucified the body in order to let the spirit blossom. That is why our spirituality was considered as the Good Friday spirituality. But this Good Friday leads to the Sunday of the Resurrection. Our spirituality, in order to put into practice the Gospel verse: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the flesh," did not wait until one came to kill the body. It sought to kill the old man through freely accepted mortification.

But those whom the Lord told us not to fear did not hesitate to exercise their horrible task of believing killers, thinking that doing so they glorified God. Our ancient and recent history gives proof of this. Our country is bathed in the blood of martyrs. But in spite of all that has happened, we are convinced that our presence in this land, next to that where Jesus Christ was born, lived and died and rose, is not only beneficial for ourselves and for the Church, but also for our non-Christian fellow citizens who appreciate this presence among them. Because, for us as well as for all those who are in the same situation, it is a question of witnessing to of Christian values in a society which is not exclusively Christian. Moreover, is it not in this context that our Lord's recommendation gains its whole value? You are the salt of the earth, the yeast in the dough, the lamp that shines in the darkness. This testimony is very precious. It sometimes must be paid with one's blood. Our Lord has told us that. His word is spirit and life. To have life; that is what is essential.

I limit myself to these thoughts. I am sure that when you answered the Lord's call, committing yourself to follow St. Vincent, and becoming missionaries in countries where you are in direct contact with Islam, you were in search of this life. I pray with you just like you pray with us that our Lord will grant us this life.

**Palabras de bienvenida a los participantes en la sesión vicenciana
"Nuestro apostolado en el mundo musulmán"**

*Por Georges Bou Jaoudé, C.M.
Visitador de la Provincia de Oriente*

Beatitud, queridos Hermanos y Hermanas:

Me siento feliz de acogerles hoy a este encuentro en el que participan miembros de una misma familia, la Familia Vicenciana, venidos de más de 25 países, para reflexionar juntos sobre el sentido y el alcance de su presencia, de su apostolado y de su testimonio en un mundo y un medio religioso diferentes del suyo, el mundo musulmán.

En nombre de la comisión preparatoria, nombrada por el Superior General, deseo que este encuentro sea para cada uno de nosotros una ocasión para una toma de conciencia cada vez mayor de la importancia del testimonio que estamos llamados a dar y de los desafíos que se nos presentan.

Les doy también la bienvenida en nombre de los Cohermanos y de las Hermanas de nuestras dos provincias de Oriente y de Próximo Oriente de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad que ejercen aquí su ministerio en cinco países de mayoría musulmana y donde coexisten y se confrontan las tres religiones monoteístas procedentes de Abraham y entre las que existen numerosos puntos de encuentro, de diferencias y de litigio.

En nombre de todas y de todos, quisiera en primer lugar dirigir una palabra de agradecimiento y de homenaje a nuestro Superior General, el P. Robert Maloney, que tomó la iniciativa de convocar la celebración de este encuentro y que está representado entre nosotros por su Vicario General, el P. José Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza y por su Asistente para las Misiones, el P. Víctor Bieler.

¿Por qué este encuentro se celebra en Líbano?

La elección de este país no es fortuita. Muchos de ustedes se han preguntado si era prudente venir aquí. De nuestro país no se conoce nada más que la imagen de la guerra y la destrucción, propagada por los medios de comunicación malintencionados y con frecuencia mal informados, pero espero que ustedes descubran, y ya han comenzado a hacerlo, un país no solamente precioso en su naturaleza, sino también un país que ama la vida y donde se vive bien, un país que desafía la muerte y la destrucción y que se levanta de sus cenizas con energía y muy rápidamente. Y esto es normal, ya que su otro nombre, Fenicia, procede precisamente del nombre de ese pájaro mitológico, el fénix.

La elección del Líbano para el desarrollo de este encuentro ha sido un acto

deliberado, querido y reflexionado, porque ha sido a lo largo de los siglos y lo sigue siendo una tierra de encuentro y de acogida, una tierra quizás de enfrentamiento, pero sobre todo de diálogo entre diferentes pueblos y civilizaciones, de diferentes culturas y religiones hasta el punto de que su régimen político ha llegado a ser un ejemplo único en su género, propuesto al mundo entero como posible fórmula de coexistencia en un mundo donde no viven encerrados en sí mismos hombres y mujeres de una misma raza o de una misma etnia, de una misma cultura y de unas mismas tradiciones, sino donde se codean las gentes de diversos colores y de culturas diversas. Y puede que sea esta fórmula original y única la que nos lleva de vez en cuando a algunos conflictos armados y la que nos ha costado últimamente 17 años de guerra.

No quisiera hacer política, sino simplemente atraer su atención sobre el hecho de que la guerra del Líbano comenzó el día en que el Presidente de la República, cristiano maronita (católico, por tanto) fue a las Naciones Unidas, en nombre de más de veinte países árabes musulmanes, a proponer la fórmula libanesa como solución al problema palestino: fórmula de coexistencia pacífica entre el Islam y el Judaísmo en un tipo de democracia comunitaria, a ejemplo de la vivida en Líbano y que, a pesar de todas sus vicisitudes, ha dado y continúa dando pruebas de validez.

En efecto, en Líbano la democracia reviste un carácter particular. El estado reconoce oficialmente 18 comunidades religiosas: cristianos (católicos, ortodoxos y evangélicos), musulmanes y judíos. Todas ellas están representadas en el parlamento y en el gobierno y participan así en la vida del estado según la proporción de sus adeptos. Sin duda, esto no siempre es fácil, pero me parece que es precisamente el fruto del ingenio libanés de intentar encontrar una solución a una situación tan variada y tan rica.

El Líbano, ya lo he dicho, ha sido siempre una tierra de acogida y de diálogo islamo-cristiano, una tierra de coexistencia y de convivencia. Y por ello su santidad el Papa Juan Pablo II no cesa de decir de él que no es simplemente una nación, sino sobre todo un mensaje.

En Líbano, mis queridos amigos, el diálogo interreligioso, y sobre todo el diálogo islamo-cristiano, no es de hoy. Data de la llegada del Islam a este país en el siglo VII. Es un diálogo de vida, de cada día y de cada momento. Los cristianos y los musulmanes no han vivido jamás en guetos cerrados. Han vivido siempre unos con otros en la misma calle, el mismo inmueble y el mismo pueblo. Y, por ejemplo, se encuentran muchos más pueblos donde viven juntos los cristianos y musulmanes, que pueblos donde viven musulmanes de confesiones diferentes (sunnitas-chiítas, sunnitas-drusos, o chiítas-drusos).

He dicho diálogo de vida y diálogo social. Esto quiere decir que cada uno permanece profundamente arraigado en los fundamentos doctrinales de su fe y no reduce su religión a una suerte de sincretismo religioso intentando camuflar los puntos de litigio teológicos y doctrinales.

Esos puntos de litigio son numerosos y fundamentales. En mi opinión, no se trata de dejarlos de lado para crear un verdadero diálogo. El cristiano, por ejemplo, no puede dejar de proclamar su fe en la Santísima Trinidad para agradar a su compatriota musulmán que lo acusa de politeísmo y, con el fin de ganar la simpatía o gozar del favor de sus vecinos, no puede tampoco negar la divinidad de Jesucristo porque el Corán la rechaza, ni reconocer a Mahoma como profeta según el sentido teológico y escriturístico de esta palabra.

En el diálogo se trata de aceptar las diferencias y de sentirse complementarios, de aceptar al otro como es y de que el otro me acepte como yo soy. Es mirar los dos en la misma dirección, según la fórmula de Saint-Exúpery.

Nuestro encuentro se desarrollará en esta óptica: miembros de la Congregación de la Misión e Hijas de la Caridad, miembros de la Familia Vicenciana, Dios nos ha plantado o sembrado en países y regiones de mayoría musulmana. Vivimos en estos países y regiones, siendo ellos mismos muy diferentes y variados (tendremos ejemplos y testimonios de ello), vamos a intentar conocer mejor los fundamentos teológicos y doctrinales de nuestros conciudadanos y reflexionar sobre los mejores medios de vivir con ellos, de testimoniar nuestra fe y nuestros compromisos, sin hacer, sin embargo, proselitismo, sino al contrario intentando ser verdaderos testimonios de Jesucristo. Ser, como él nos ha dicho, la sal del alimento y la levadura en el pan.

VARIOUS TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

by Jean Landousies CM
Province of Paris

(The first part of the talk given in Beirut has already been published in Vincentiana, 3- 1995, May-June, pp. 154-162. Only the second part of the talk is given here).

More than a thousand million people at present (about 18% of the world's population) claim to be Moslem. Formerly these believers were to be met in "Moslem" countries or where there had been a strong Moslem incursion. Nowadays a Moslem presence is seen in Western European countries.

We cannot be indifferent to this reality, for we realise that engagement with Islam is an important challenge for the Church and our society in the years ahead, perhaps worldwide. What will the relationship be? At present we notice everywhere, to some extent at least, degrees of relationship that range from benevolent welcome, often because relations on a human level are good and long-standing, to incomprehension or fear based on mutual misunderstanding or on attitudes in certain groups which are tending more and more towards aggression and proselytism. I am in favour of an ever more realistic and fruitful meeting between believers, and, regarding myself as a "friendly witness", I would like to cast a rapid glance over some matters which are being debated at present in Moslem society.

At the outset I would like to remind you that I am speaking here from experience which embraces Islam on both sides of the Mediterranean and in sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Contemporary Interpretations of the Koran

The first point I want to deal with is that of some contemporary interpretations of the holy book of Islam. Alongside the traditional interpretations, which remain relevant for many Moslems, perhaps even for the majority, other approaches to the text arise from questions which modern science asks, or from Islam in confrontation with modernity (1). Islam searches in its sources for ways towards a necessary development, but sometimes it also hardens, and rejects all development because it judges that to be contrary to its spirit and likely to corrupt its purity. I will give two examples of these contemporary interpretations.

a. The first example is what I will call "**scientific interpretations**" of the Koran. These are, above all, apologetic interpretations. They aim at showing that advance notice of contemporary scientific discoveries can be found in the Koran. This is a way of trying to demonstrate to Moslems and non-Moslems that the

Koran must have a divine origin. There is a book, fairly well known in the West, which lays out this thesis. It is *La Bible, le Coran et la science* by Dr Bucaille, and has been translated into several languages. He adopts the approach of Moslem authors in Egypt (Tantawi Jawhari, 1940) or Tunisia (Ahmed Hanafi) and attempts to show that all present-day discoveries were foreseen in the Koran, whilst there are a number of errors and improbabilities in the Bible (I am simplifying)! To serve as an example I will quote a passage from the introduction to a book by the Algerian Mohamad Kassab *Gloire à Dieu, ou les mille vérités du Coran*, 1990:

You will find, for example, that matters as diverse as the primeval atom, the Big Bang, the expansion of the universe, the speed of light, the organization of the cosmos, the formation of the earth, the cycle of water, human reproduction and very many others as well, were set out more than fourteen centuries before western experts “invented” them in their turn.

There is no difficulty, obviously, in showing how risky such an interpretation is, and it is becoming more and more widespread and popular!

b. Let us move on to another sort of interpretation of the Koran, **the political interpretations**. These develop in opposition to western influence and its “models” of society which up to now have been imposed on Moslem society, especially in the wake of colonialism. We can see at present a multiplication of commentaries, interpretations, and reflexions on the relationship of religion and politics in Islam. Several trends can be cited:

- The Egyptian Sayyed Qotb, “The Moslem Brother” (one of the political islamist trends, or of what I have called radical Islam), bases himself on classical interpreters, known as reformists, from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries., such as Mohamed Abdou or Rachid Rida, as well as the famous Ibn Taymyya who is the inspiration of the Wahabites of Saudi Arabia. In this trend it is a matter of making present the original koranic experience in order to “renew spiritual, social, political and economic life by Moslem law and an Moslem state”. In other words, it is a question of establishing an Islamic state in which all laws are based on the Koran. There is no sovereignty other than that of God, no law other than divine law. Man has no power over his fellow man since all power belongs to God. All Moslems, no matter what their origin, are united under God’s flag. From this perspective there can be no talk of “human rights”, but only of the rights of God.

- On the other hand, Moslems such as Mohammed Arkoun (who lives in France) try to define more accurately the links between religion and politics, by demanding a new interpretation of the Koran involving a genuinely scientific analysis of both history and the coranic text. Others, such as the grand mufti of Marseilles, Soheib Bencheikh, are endeavouring to demonstrate that there is no incompatibility between Islam and everyday human living, and therefore that Moslems can live out their faith in the context of a secularised west. This is certainly a very interesting trend for the future. But these are often Moslem thinkers

who live outside Moslem countries and who cannot always express their opinions in their own countries.

2. In Contemporary Europe

The trends of which we have spoken above stretch right across the whole spectrum of the Moslem world., though of course there are varying nuances from one country to another. I would like to go on now to deal with what concerns our western European countries.

The situation varies because Moslems are in a minority in the countries, or, as a rule, arrived only recently. (I refer here to countries like Italy, or France, and not to European countries such as Albania where the presence of Islam goes much further back).

The first thing to be noted is that Moslem communities in our countries are very fragmented. There is a huge variety of ethnic and ideological backgrounds. There are very many Moslem organizations. They often depend on foreign countries, depending on the background of the Moslems. Let us examine two important trends in contemporary Moslem communities:

a. **A contented Islam**, fitting as minorities into society as it actually exists in Europe. This, I think, is the case with most of the immigrant Moslems assimilated into our countries. For them there is no question of trying to establish Moslem states in Europe. They are trying to enable Moslems to be fully Italian, french, German, etc, while at the same time being fully Moslem. It is against this background that we have to view some of their claims, such as the possibility of building mosques or having a visible presence in society.

b. There is also a more “**missionary**” Islam which wants to win Europe over to Islam. Their thinking is simple, namely that Islam is the final revelation, the religion for everybody. In addition to this these Moslems say that they notice the bankruptcy of the communist and capitalist ideologies, as well as the moral degradation of Europe. In their opinion only Islam can bring salvation. This, moreover, should encourage us to look closely at the way in which European or western culture is perceived in the Moslem world, especially as portrayed on television. We must not forget that for the majority of Moslems (at least of those in the mediterranea basin) European and Christian are synonymous! This “missionary” message of islam is communicated to Moslems in many ways: the work of many Islamic centres, publications, preaching, in the family ceircle, etc..., and sometimes even in mixed marriages. In a family the children follow the religion of the father, who is always Moslem; in practice, a Moslem woman cannot marry a non-Moslem. In this way the growth of the Moslem community is always safeguarded.

We Christians, up against this state of affairs, should not retreat into ourselves. The attitude of a Christian cannot be other than an attitude of encounter, of welcome for others, of dialogue. This does not mean a naïve attitude! This should not make us blind to the real problems which face us, nor prevent our trying to solve them in truth and charity. That calls for learning the ways of true discernment.

3. Some Present-day Challenges

Let us make a quick survey of some of the challenges which face Islam today, and that means our Moslem contemporaries. We have already referred to this. I want now to put it in a more schematic way.

a. Authenticity and modernity.

In today's world Islam is up against its wish to retain doctrinal authenticity which links it to its past, and in which it finds its nourishment for the present. We see this desire to return to the past especially in the movements which are called traditionalist, Islamic or otherwise. But also, in a more general way, many Moslems have their eyes fixed on a "golden age" to which they are constantly referring, the period of great Moslem artistic, literary and scientific culture, a period which has assumed a mythical aura.

But opposed to that there are the challenges of modernity. Moslems have to face the present and work towards a future of which they are no longer the architects, and this is so even in places which they would regard as their own territory.

On a still deeper level Islam's fundamental truth is a book of revelation whose contents are divine, eternal, immutable and valid for all places and times. That means that truth has been revealed once and for all. The Koran is the definitive form of this right down to its wording. Now a characteristic of the modern mind is a certain relativity with regard to truth, or at least its concrete expression, as well as a progressive development in the discovery of truth. There is a constant on-going search for truth. Modernity is also a state of mind which holds that there is nothing which is beyond questioning or not subject to being elaborated in other ways. This is a challenge also for Christianity, which, however, is better able to face up to it because it does not see truth as a book to be taken literally, a fund of knowledge, but sees truth as a person. In a certain sense it can be said that a Christian does not possess truth, but allows himself to be possessed by it. Truth is the person of Christ. While keeping a proper sense of proportion the Koran should be compared with the role of the person of Jesus and not with that of the bible. And starting from that we can see that everything is changed in our understanding of the meaning of life. On the one hand there is a Book which has an answer for everything, and on the other

people allow themselves to be possessed by a person who guides us on the paths of the truth which has to be discovered and welcomed.

This means that Islam is caught between, on the one hand the authenticity of a truth given as a blunt fact, unchangeable, the Koran, and on the other the modernity of truth, a knowledge which is in continual re-structuring in all areas. Because of that the question is whether we are to try to modernise Islam or islamise modernity! Moslems have to work that one out. There is in some way an opposition of fact between an authenticity which is Moslem and a modernity which is not. This is a challenge which Moslems have to live with, a sort of basic question: how can one be Moslem today without losing what comprises the authenticity of the faith and at the same time accepting the challenges of modernity.

b. Some questions which stem from this

With this as my starting point I want to touch on various questions which Moslem thinkers have to ask today in order to answer these challenges.

* The first is the understanding of the concept of revelation. In my opinion this is the really fundamental question which colours all others. As I have just said, the Koran is the Word of God, given once and for all, unchangeable, giving literally God's law, etc. All a person has to do to obey God is to submit to this law. Given this understanding of Scripture it becomes difficult, or rather impossible, to lay hands on it, to make new interpretations of this Word of God for today. It is, moreover, easier and safer to accept a book which says all that has to be done rather than to try and find out what God wishes to say to us today by his Word. This is also a tendency of certain believers outside Islam.

* Linked to the idea of revelation is the idea of freedom. It may be easily understood how that way of understanding revelation runs the risk of limiting a person's freedom. A person merely has to obey divine law as expressed literally in the Koran. "Religions of the Book" are, of course, allowable, but their members must be faithful to their books in so far as they have not been falsified. Fundamentally it is Islam that is the original religion of the human race, and all people must return to it. On the other hand, although the question of individual freedoms has become essential in modern societies, in Islam it is the communitarian dimension which remains the most important. Deviating from the religious laws of the community means being excluded not only from the religious community properly so-called, which could be acceptable, but also from society itself. It can, therefore, be seen that it is religious freedom which is seriously compromised in that way.

* There is another point which seems to me to be very important when it comes to Islam facing up to the questions posed by modernity. This is the idea of God which Moslems have, a Unique God in the strictest meaning of the adjective.

Because of this idea of God it is very difficult to justify diversity in any field whatsoever. It is amazing to note how the idea of unicity has prime importance in all aspects of Moslem life. One sole God (I would say Monolithic), only one believing people (the Umma, the Moslem community), which survives as a myth which people are constantly trying to make present, the rites which are unique for everyone, but also in other areas there is the search for one sole nation, even one sole political party, etc. To be different is not regarded favourably! It is, however, true that in the Koran itself there may be seen some openings towards recognition of diversity: "If God had wanted to He could have made of you one sole nation", but the underlying idea there is that he did not so wish. Nowadays certain thinkers, starting from there, are trying to show that other people, with their differences, can be accepted. As for those of us who are Christians, we could profitably deepen our idea of God as Trinity, and the consequences flowing from our ideas of man and existence, in all their diversity.

To finish off, and as something to take away, I indicate some other important themes in the life of society which are challenges for Islam in the face of modernity:

- the role of religion in a secularised society, and questions such as separation of Church and State, democracy, the laity
- the place of woman in society.
- representation of the Moslem community in national or international situations where they are in a minority. As there are no clergy in Islam, as each one is, in a certain sense, alone before God, who in actual fact has the authority to represent Islam?

All these questions, and many others, are important for contemporary society. Moslems find this out in so far as they acknowledge other societies, other religions, other people. Dialogue between Christians and Moslems can, of course, help us to seek together for satisfactory answers to questions which we have in common, even if they emerge in different contexts.

Bibliography: In preparing this talk I have drawn on the work of Mgr Pierre Claverie and, above all, of that of Père Henri Sanson SJ, of Algiers, and especially his booklet *Que penser de l'Islam?*, Editions Fidélité, Namur 1993, 50 pp.

(1) Translator's note: The author uses the French word *modernité* throughout this talk. There is no exactly corresponding English word in common usage. The large Harrap's dictionary gives three translations: modernity, modernness, up-to-dateness. I have chosen the first, as the least grating.

(THOMAS DAVITT, C.M., translator)

How I, as a believing and practicing Muslim, look at the Christian faith

By Hisham Nashabé

Allow me first to tell you, in the form of a testimony, my experience as a Lebanese Muslim with the Christians I have known, and among whom I have lived and worked. I give this testimony because I want to emphasize that the attitude of Muslims towards Christians, and, I suppose, of Christians towards Muslims, is not determined only by the sacred texts and official attitudes of Christians and Muslims towards each other, but also by the living experience that they have as compatriots and fellow-believers in the Abrahamic tradition which they share.

I will then present to you, very briefly, the doctrinal attitude of Islam toward the Christian faith. Finally, I will make a few simple proposals which I think will lead to the creation of a better spirit of understanding and cooperation among believers on both sides.

Very early in life I had the opportunity to come in contact with Christians, both in neighbouring Syria and in Lebanon. My father, a graduate of the Ottoman Law School in Istanbul, and a member of a family which claims descent from the family of the Prophet (Peace be on Him), had joined Amir Faisal Ibn al Hussain who, in 1918, had proclaimed himself King of Syria. That was the first Arab state which was created after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. My father became one of the first judges in the nascent Arab State which at the time included present-day Syria and Lebanon.

When the Arab hopes to establish an independent Arab state were brutally shattered, and both Syria and Lebanon came under French rule, my father, although from Tripoli (Lebanon) opted to stay in the Syrian judiciary, because he felt, as many other people, that Syria was the larger, more secure and stable state than the newly created State of Greater Lebanon.

Thus, my early years at school began in Latakia (Syria). In 1935, I was in Kindergarten at the Collège des Frères, in Latakia, a missionary French School. My father, a devout Muslim of noble descent whose ancestry includes many illustrious ulamà', chose to send his children to a Christian missionary school because government schools at that time were worse, poorly equipped, staffed by half-educated teachers and housed in run-down buildings.

He and my mother knew well the risk that they were running by sending their children to Christian missionary schools; they knew that their children would be taught Christianity, not Islam, and that they might be alienated from their own faith

and tradition. But they were ready to accept this risk because they wanted to give their children a good education, i.e., along education on western lines and a good knowledge of French. Of course, they would have preferred to give them also a good Islamic education, but this, they thought, they would provide at home... and this is indeed what they did.

This awareness on the part of my parents did not prevent them from being scandalised and deeply offended when I came home one day - I was only four years old - to recite to my mother what I was taught at school: it was a Christian prayer which started with "Au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saint Esprit" and then a short text which I learned by heart, it said, "Maman Cherie, Petit Jésus m'a donné un grand coeur pour t'aimer beaucoup maman...".

For me that was the beginning of a systematic exposure to, what seemed to me, two alien and antagonistic faiths: Islam, my, ancestral faith at home, to which my father and mother were keen on developing in me a sense of belonging, and Christianity which was the faith of the French oppressor which I was to accept with mixed feelings of animosity, admiration and fear.

It is remarkable, however, that at home we never discussed or compared Islam and Christianity. We just accepted that they were different, but that Islam was superior without really knowing why, and that Islam was "our religion" and that Christianity was "theirs."

As the years went by my elder brothers and I moved from one missionary school to another: the Franciscan Sisters in Aleppo, then the Frères Maristes in Aleppo too, then the Jesuit School in Homs, then the Collège des Frères in Tripoli (Lebanon). In the meantime, my father thought that I should have an education in English, and thus I went to the American College in Aleppo, a Protestant missionary school, and then to a national non-missionary school in Tripoli (Lebanon), and finally to the American University in Beirut. Upon graduation from AUB, I went to McGill University in Montreal (Canada) and then to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts (USA).

Never until my university years at McGill have I ever had a systematic education in my own faith. Nor have I had a systemic knowledge of Christianity. But I learned a lot about Christianity indirectly, and by daily exposure to it in the classes of religion, in the prayer meetings and by various subtle influences during class at school and outside it. I must say, that this exposure did not develop in me an appreciation of the Christian faith and its values. This appreciation came from a different source, and, strange as it may seem, from my father himself, whose deep commitment and knowledge of Islam and his social contacts and numerous Christian friends had a marked influence on my attitude towards Christians, especially Arab Christians, both Catholic and Orthodox.

In a very subtle manner my father was teaching us - my brothers and I- that commitment to Islam was in no way incompatible with a very genuine respect for Christianity and the love and friendship we must feel toward Christians. While in Syria we used to receive regular visits from Christian dignitaries and bishops of various denominations. These visits were often quite informal. I remember that the atmosphere of these visits was genuinely friendly, and as a child, and later as a young man, I used to enjoy the conversation, often light, and, sometimes, of high intellectual quality which took place during these visits. The differences and similarities between Islam and Christianity were often brought up in the course of these conversations, but never was there tension or malice... my father felt a real friendship toward his guests.

I remember vividly that during the forties and fifties my father used to spend the summer in Becharré, a Maronite village in North Lebanon. A bishop from Dimàan the summer residence of the Maronite Patriarch (I think his name was Bishop Risha) used to welcome my father in Bacharré on behalf of the Patriarch, at the beginning of summer, and my father used to pay back the visit. I used to accompany father on these visits. Our host, Patriarch Arida at that time, was a very dear friend of my father. Their conversation during the visit was delightful to follow; both of them were experts in the art of conversation. When issues related to religion were brought up, neither of them felt that he had be reserved or diplomatic; they were respectful and appreciative of each others' differences and accepted them, I dare say, with pleasure; they seemed to be happy with the differences, even positively fascinated. This had a tremendous influence on my young mind and influenced my attitude towards the Christian clergy throughout my life. When, later in life, I had some unhappy encounters with Christian clergymen like Monseigneur Ignace Maroun and Father Boulos Nimàn, I was doubly disappointed because this was not what I had experienced with the Christian clergy I had known in my father's company in Syria, in Becharré and Dimaàn.

My experience was much more successful during the civil war in Lebanon. It was during these terrible years of sorrow and anguish that I came to know Father Augustin Dupré La Tour (a Jesuit) and Father André Scrima (a Greek Orthodox). I owe them both a great deal; a first hand knowledge of Christianity on matters of mutual concern, and a profound respect for the noble feelings they felt towards me. With them, I and Professor Yusuf Ibish, established in 1978, and while the civil war was at its worst stages, the Institute of Muslim-Christian Studies at St. Joseph University. Two years later, I established at the Islamic Makassed Philanthropic Association the Institute of Islamic Studies, and in 1994 a protocol of academic cooperation between St. Joseph University and Makassed was signed stipulating modes of academic cooperation between the two Institutes. This protocol is a unique example of cooperation between two academic institutions, one Christian and the other Muslim, and needs to be highlighted in the history of Christian - Muslim relations in Lebanon. This cooperation continues to this day and carries the seeds of an even deeper and wider cooperation in the future.

Apart from this living experience with Christianity and Christians, a Muslim's view of Christianity is derived from Islam itself, and, more specifically, from the Quran and Hadith. In the second part of this paper, this is what I will try to summarize.

For a Muslim, the Quran is the revealed Word of God and the acceptance of the Quran as such is a prerequisite of faith in Islam. God has revealed one religion. This religion is Islam. Abraham the father of all later Prophets (Peace be on them) was a Muslim (hanif) and so were they. The message is one and the same, but as a result of historical circumstances the authenticity of this message has not been properly preserved. Only with Muhammad who delivered the Abrahamic message in the 7th century of the Christian era, that is "in the full light of history," has this message been fully preserved in its entirety in the Holy Quran whose text remains unquestionably authentic despite some attempts at casting doubts on this authenticity. These attempts have generally been vitiated by obvious bias, insufficiently documented, or, have touched form but not substance.

Hadith literature, which is the second major source of Islam, includes an invaluable source of knowledge about Islamic faith and practice. Unfortunately, however, hadith literature was not been compiled until two hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him) and has been tampered with, sometimes with good intentions, sometimes not, and must therefore be judged on the basis of the Quran, so that only that hadith which agrees with the Quran must have a binding force on Muslims.

I say this because I do not want to ascribe to Islam what this or that Muslim says about it, concerning Islam's position towards Christians. Such opinions by individual Muslims - be they scholars, poets, sufis or average Muslims - are important in so far as they represent the evolution of Muslim society, but they are not necessarily true, or beyond criticism by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Bearing this in mind, what is the Quran's view of Christianity and Christians?

The Quran refers to Christians as "al-Nasara" (the people of Nazareth) and to Christ as "al-masih" (the messiah) and as Isà b. Maryam. It is an article of faith in Islam to believe in "Isa and his message which cannot be essentially different from the Islamic message. Indeed Islam in history came to vindicate and complete previous divine messages.

The followers of Jesus (Peace be on him) are referred to in the Quran as ahl al-kitab (people of the book) and are described as the "nearest people" to Muslims. Muslims are, therefore, bound to respect the followers of Jesus, their religious authorities, and their places of worship. These basic precepts were scrupulously observed during the life to time of the Prophet Muhammad and have generally been

adhered to in the Muslim world throughout Islamic history. Even in the worst periods of religious wars, namely during period of the Crusades, Muslim historians generally refrained from making injurious remarks about Christianity. When they fought the Crusaders they did not fight them because they were Christians, but because they invaded Muslim lands, and were referred to as "the foreigners." (al-faranj).

Muslim jurists, under the influence of circumstances that surrounded them, established rules for the treatment of Christian minorities in Muslim lands, which were tolerant and respectful by any standard. Even during the periods of decadence, and under the Ottoman caliphate (1517 - 1920) the laws governing the treatment of Christians were exceptionally tolerant. Occasional outbursts of fanaticism were rare and often the result of obvious provocation.

Muslims, however, refuse the "divinity of Jesus," and his crucifixion. They also reject the concept of the Trinity. Christian practices like the representation of Jesus and saints in statues, pictures and other such forms are not accepted by Muslims; neither is the concept of the Purgatory, the sacrosanct decisions of Church authorities, the eating of pork, the drinking of wine and the concept of the original sin. Celibacy is not a virtue in Islam, The separation of church and state are foreign to Islam and generally rejected.

Muslims are also becoming increasingly aware of the distinction between Western Christianity and Eastern Christianity. The first as being associated with a materialist civilization, while Eastern Christianity is generally considered nearer to the pristine purity of early Christianity.

Muslims both at the official academic and popular levels have, on the other hand, shown a keen interest in participating in the Christian - Muslim dialogue and have been engaged actively in it. This new culture of dialogue augurs well for the future relations between the two great faiths, Christianity and Islam. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that the religious character of the Twenty-First Century may be determined primarily by the outcome of the Christian - Muslim dialogue and the eventual cooperation between them to create a "culture of peace" where ethics and morality provide the necessary guidelines for scientific and technological progress.

In conclusion, may I present for your consideration a few general principles which, to my mind, are essential for the success of the Christian - Muslim dialogue:

1. That toleration, mutual respect and even appreciation of each others' differences must become a living culture in both Muslim and Christian countries, and not just mottos or emblems.

2. That living together and working together must be considered more

important, at least at this juncture in time, than theoretical and theological dissensions which may lead to dead ends or, allow me the expression, "analysis paralysis."

3. That Christians and Muslims must refrain from undertaking missionary work in each others' lands or among each others' communities. Rather, missionary effort must be conducted among atheists and anti-religious groups and individuals.

4. That Christians and Muslims must stand united in the face of the exploitation of religion to foment conflicts or to serve political and material ends.

5. Finally, as a Lebanese and a Muslim it will help me a great deal if Christians all over the world join hands with Muslims to help them free Southern Lebanon from occupation by Israel, and protect Jerusalem from becoming the capital of one religion at the expense of all others. Efforts must rather be directed toward keeping the Sacred City of Jerusalem, as it has always been, in Arab hands of all faiths, a true heaven for peace for all three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

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Saint Vincent and Islam

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In St. Vincent's time Islam was both a far-off, and a near at hand, reality.¹ For centuries Muslim forces had been taking over the Mediterranean basin and threatening the whole of Christian Europe. The seizure of the island of Chios in 1566 by the Turks, and a few years later their capture of Cyprus, was still fresh in people's minds. People often referred to the victory of Lepanto, October 7, 1571, to show that that the Muslim forces were not invincible. In his letter to Firmin Get, Superior at Marseilles, Saint Vincent wrote: "*Thank you for the great news you gave me of the naval victory of the Venetians and the Order of Malta over the Turks. (This was the battle that took place at the entrance to the Dardanelles on June 23, 1656). "O Mon Dieu, Monsieur, what a motive for praising God for such a prodigious victory, surpassing even that of Lepanto."*"² (VI, 61-62).

The importance of Islam in the time of St. Vincent

The problem of Islam is more or less overshadowed by the spread of Protestantism which seems all the more dangerous because at that time it was regarded as a perversion of Christianity coming from within that religion itself. Yet in spite of everything, in St. Vincent's time, the Muslim thrust is still on the agenda. When Corneille, in 1636-1637 puts on his tragedy "Le Cid", the spectators hardly need to have the history of the Reconquest of Spain explained to them. From time to time the idea of a Crusade against the Turks is proposed again. Father Joseph, the unofficial influential figure behind Cardinal Richelieu, praises the holy war against Islam in his 4, 037 line poem "La Turclade" written in Latin. Together with Prince Charles of Gonzague-Nevers, he establishes the "Christian militia" which recruits volunteers from the nobility of all Europe with the aim of reconquering the Ottoman Empire. In 1626 the *parlement* of Provence reminds the king who is a fervent Christian, that the Mediterranean brought him "the most salutary gift" he could ever receive: "That sea, Sire, made you a Christian. Make it Christian once again." In his political testament Richelieu recommends the building of a fleet of galleys, not only for the purpose of standing up to Spain but also to overawe the Grand Sultan.

The Turkish threat is an every day reality, at least in those regions bordering the Mediterranean. St. Vincent is not mistaken when he speaks about "*the Turkish brigantines that lie in wait in the Gulf of Lyons to catch the ships coming from*

¹ This text is taken in part from my article with the same title, published in the "Bulletin of the Vincentians in France", n°98, February 1985

² The references in this text are taken from P. Coste, *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* – 14 Volumes, Paris, 1920--1925

Beaucaire". (1,4). Nobody is safe from this danger, neither the Knights of Malta (VII, 87), nor the servants of the household of Cardinal Antonio Barberini (V,31). St. Vincent speaks about the dangers facing some confreres as they travel by ship from Marseilles to Genoa and to Rome, dangers that come "*from the Turkish expeditions in those seas.*" (XII, 67). Jean Barreau, in Algiers, conjures up the same danger when he writes on June 5, 1655: "*never have so much violence and insolence been witnessed as at present. The Algerians are relying on thirty-six to forty ships that they have under their control, manifesting a general contempt for all the Christians in the world, except for the English, who have shown them that they have just as many and more powerful ships.*" (VIII, 536).

When we read St. Vincent we are amazed at the number of slaves and the wide variety of places they come from. They are from Cape Breton, Agde, Boulogne, the Basque region and Paris (V, 3,1); from Le Havre, Nancy, Nogent-Sur-Seine, Saint –Jean-de Luz (VII, 182-183); from Dieppe, Amiens....(VIII,540)..We can understand St. Vincent's concern: "*God grant*", he writes to Jean Barreau, "*that the Turks may stop capturing so many prisoners.*" (V, 3,1). The Turks are organised and they know where to find the best prey. They are supplied with good information from renegades and unscrupulous traders; they have their tactics and when they set off for a raid they leave so suddenly that no foreigner can possibly know where they are heading. Jean Barreau apologises for the delay in sending his letter of June 5, 1655, a delay caused by two ships , ready for Leghorn, "*being delayed because of the galleys that left yesterday to go privateering.*" (VIII, 535).

Relations with Islamic countries

It is true that the whole of Christianity trembles at the threat posed by the Turks. However, this does not prevent many political, economic and even social contacts continuing with Islamic countries. France has firm relations with the Ottoman Empire after the concessions made in 1535 between Francis I and Suliman the Magnificent led to the setting up in Paris of the Royal College, later to become the College of France, where Arabic, Hebrew and Turkish were taught. These concessions were renegotiated some years later. St. Vincent refers to them in his letter to Jean Barreau in 1651, explaining the efforts he is making to have him set free after his unjustifiable arrest in Algiers: "*It has finally been decided*", he tells him, "*to write to Constantinople, and the King will register a complaint with the Porte [the French referred to the Turkish government as the Sublime Porte] about your imprisonment, asking that the articles of peace and alliance agreed upon by Henry IV and the Grand Turk in the year 1604 be put into effect. When this is done, the Turks will have to stop their raids on the French and give back the slaves they have*". (IV, 140).

St. Vincent is even more explicit in the petition he addresses to Jean de la Haye –Vantelay, the French ambassador in Constantinople, asking him to recognise Martin Housson as consul in Tunis: *“I beg you to accept it, and also, My Lord, to be allowed to add my own very humble supplication to the letter which the King has written to you, asking you to use your good offices with the Grand Turk, and that you may be pleased to grant M. Husson, Consul for the French nation at Tunis, an authentic declaration ordaining that, in conformity with the provisions of the former capitulations agreed upon by our Kings and His Highness, the following nations pay without objection the consular duties to the said consul of France and his successors. These are: the French, Venetians, Spanish, inhabitants of Leghorn, Italians, Genoese, Sicilians and all Greeks – both those subject to His Highness and the others – Flemish, Dutch, Germans, Swedes, Jews, and, in general, all those, regardless of nationality (except for the English), who trade or will trade with Tunis.....and all the other ports, harbours, and beaches of the said kingdom of Tunis.”* (V, 82-83). This text shows that St. Vincent is well informed about the range of privileges granted by the concessions.

Information about Islam

Moreover, the Arabic language is not unknown in the West and this makes for better relations with Islam. In 1584, the final year of the Pontificate of Gregory XIII who had a very open attitude to Christians in the east, Cardinal Ferdinand de Medici set up in Rome an important printing press that had a range of Oriental characters. Its first important publication is an edition of the Bible in Latin and Arabic, printed in 1591. At this time biblical scholars use Arabic to improve their knowledge of Hebrew. Some of them even believe that the Arabic versions of the Bible come from Syriac texts (Syriac is easily confused with Armenian) that predate the Greek manuscripts used by St. Jerome.

This explains why Francois Du Coudray who was sent to Rome to study Semitic languages wishes to translate the Syriac bible into Latin. St. Vincent tries to dissuade him from doing this and writes to him saying: *“You have spent three or four years learning Hebrew and you know it well enough to be able to uphold the cause of the Son of God in His own language and confound His enemies in that kingdom.”* (I, 251-252). Du Coudray must also have had quite a good knowledge of Arabic, and this, together with his knowledge of Italian, accounts for his success with the Turks when he gave missions to the galley slaves from Marseilles. For this reason, too, in 1649 St. Vincent wishes to send him to Algiers to negotiate the release of 80 Christian captives (II, 317, 368) but he is not able to leave for that country (II, 423).

It is in Paris that the best Arabic scholar of that time, the Dutchman Thomas Erpenius, learns Arabic and this enables him, in 1613, to publish a grammar in Arabic that was to be unequalled for two centuries. In 1647 Paris saw the first

translation of the Koran into French, “The Koran of Mohammed translated from Arabic into French” by Andre du Ryer. In 1630 this man was appointed royal translator in oriental languages after being French consul in Alexandria and in Cairo.

So the Islamic religion is not unknown to eastern Christians. In his book “Pensees” that he began to write after 1653, Pascal takes pains to challenge the value of the Koran and to question the credibility of Mohammed.³ In Madagascar, Charles Nacquart uses his catechism that was published in Paris in 1657 under the title “Petit Catechisme”, to teach the morning and night prayers used by the Missionaries in instructing the Neophytes and the Catechumens in the island of Madagascar, a book written entirely in French and Malagasy. This book which contains thirty instructions uses phrases from the Arabic Koran to translate certain religious terms into Malagasy.⁴ As for St. Vincent, he is deeply moved by the spectacular conversions of Muslims that he witnessed in Rome as a young man. On February 28, 1608, he writes to his patron, Monsieur de Comet: “*There is nothing new that I can write to you about except for the conversion of three Tartar families who came to this city to become Christians – His Holiness received them with tears in his eyes.*” (1, 17).

St. Vincent’s interest in countries dominated by Islam

St. Vincent’s interest in these Islamic countries may perhaps date from the time of his captivity in N. Africa between the years 1605 and 1607. A few years ago it was considered smart to question whether this event actually took place, either in order to emphasise the mentality of this young man from the Landes who was looking for ways to improve his social status, or else to underline the importance of his spiritual transformation after 1611.⁵ It is true that some people find this episode puzzling. St. Vincent’s secretary, Brother Ducourneau, says he knows absolutely nothing about it. (VIII, 5.13).

In our times, however, several writers recognise that St. Vincent’s captivity in Tunis and his escape to Aigues-Mortes are a distinct possibility.⁶ We have to remember that this is not simply an account given in passing. Young Vincent wrote

³ Pascal, “Oeuvres completes”, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, Gallimard, 1954, pp 1192-1193

⁴ L. Chierotti, “Il catechismo malgascio del 1657”, *Vincentiana*, n° 3, 1990, p.326

⁵ One of the first writers to question the reality of St. Vincent’s captivity is A. Redier, “The true life of St. Vincent de Paul”, Paris, 1927. His thesis is taken up and developed by P. Grandchamp, “The feigned captivity of St. Vincent de Paul in Tunis,” partly printed in *Tunis*, 1928-1929, and reedited in 1965 in the *Chronicles of Tunisia*.

⁶ After the example of G. Turbet-Delof who refuted Grandchamp’s arguments in his article, “Was St. Vincent de Paul a captive in Tunis?”, *Revue d’Histoire de l’Eglise de France*, Vol. VII, n° 161, July-December 1972, p. 331-340, we quote the following texts; P. Miquel, “Vincent de Paul”, Fayard, 1996. B. Pujot, “Vincent de Paul, le precurseur”, Albin Michel, 1998. R. Wulfman, “Charite publique et finances privees: Monsieur Vincent, gestionnaire et saint”, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998. B. Koch, “Saint Vincent, expert en procedure”, *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, n° 168, April 1999, p. 93-110.

several letters on this topic (1, 1 to 17). Besides, even if his captivity is not historically true, we can only be amazed at the choice of such an account to explain an absence lasting two years. He could easily have thought up some other excuse like that of a long illness. St. Vincent speaks about Barbary because this place has a special appeal for him. His interest in the place will increase when he is appointed Chaplain General to the Galleys in 1619. Tradition has it that when he returns to Marseilles for the first time in that capacity, he is received by the White Penitents of the Holy Trinity, established in Marseilles in 1306 by the Trinitarians, and whose members are committed to contributing alms to the redemption of captives.⁷

Islamic countries will always be of interest to St. Vincent de Paul. His first missionary project to a foreign country will be to Constantinople, the centre of the Ottoman Empire, just one year after the Congregation of the Mission was definitively approved by Pope Urban VIII. On July 25, 1634, he writes: "*The Ambassador to Turkey did me the honour of writing to me, calling for priests from Saint-Nicolas and from the Mission. He thinks they will be able to do more there than I would dare to tell you.*" (I, 253). The ambassador in question is Henri de Gournay, Count de Marcheville, who has just had two chapels built within the embassy compound. Through the vindictiveness of the kapudan pasha or Lord High Admiral of the Turkish fleet, he is forced to destroy one of them before his expulsion in May 1634.⁸

St. Vincent's intentions

St. Vincent even has long-term projects in mind for in this same letter to M. Du Coudray in Rome, he adds: "*Bring with you, please, ...that good young Maronite if you think he wishes to give himself to God in this Little Company. And please practise speaking modern Greek with him on the way so that you may teach it here if necessary: who knows?*" So St. Vincent already has plans for evangelisation in countries subject to Islam. His desire that modern Greek should be taught is an indication of the importance he attached to studying languages. (V, 228, 358-359; XII, 26-29 and particularly 66-67).

His interest in the Near East is shown on several occasions. In 1649 he mediates with Jacques Charon, penitentiary of Paris and a member of the Council of Conscience, in finding a compromise in the problem between the Franciscans and the Capuchins with regard to the consular chapel in Saida, which the Capuchins want to make into a parish. The meeting is held at Saint-Lazare on January 8, 1649, and a concordat is signed between the Roman Priests of Saint-Brieuc and Ambrose d'Auray on the one hand, and Joseph de Sainte-Marie, Procurator of the Holy Land, on the other. The Capuchins agree to give up their rights over the chapel while the Franciscans promise not to make difficulties over their present possession of it."⁹

⁷ H. Simard, "Saint Vincent de Paul et ses oeuvres a Marseille", Lyon, Vitte, 1894, p. 19

⁸ R. Mantran, "Istanbul dans la seconde moitie du XVII Siecle", Maisonneuve, 1962, p.553-554

⁹ G. de Vaumas, "L'evail missionnaire de la France au XVII siecle", Bloud et Gay, 1959, p.330

In 1658, again it is St. Vincent that the Capuchin, Fr. Sylvestre approaches, to ask for financial aid for Lebanon. He wants, in fact, to nominate Sheikh Abou-Naufal as Governor of Lebanon. He will have to pay out a lot in bribes and so needs 12,000 ecus. St. Vincent is very familiar with this procedure which has its advantages but also its dangers. He is not ready to forget the public humiliations suffered by Brother Barreau, consul in Algiers, the last occasion for these being only six months previously.(VII, 116).

He voices his doubts about the usefulness of such a procedure and writes: *“There would be reason to fear that the new Governor might not be supported for long, either because he might not be to the liking of the Turks or because the Grand Vizier is changed frequently, causing instability in the offices and the duties he assigns. What so often happens is that what one person does, his successor cancels. For these reasons, considerable expense would be incurred but without much success.”* (VII, 326)..In spite of his misgivings, St. Vincent does advance him a small sum. Unfortunately this is not enough to satisfy Fr. Sylvestre who consoles himself by getting Louis XIV to nominate Abou-Naufal as consul in Beirut in 1663.

St. Vincent’s special concern

However, it is the countries of North Africa, known as Barbary, that have the strongest appeal for Saint Vincent. As Chaplain General of the Galleys he has first-hand knowledge of the wretched state of most of the prisoners in the galley crews, whether these men be prisoners condemned by the law or Muslims reduced to slavery. His concerned gaze reaches out beyond France to the prisons of Algeria. He thinks of starting up some kind of mission there, under the pretext of ransoming captives and even of founding “a sort of hospital for the galley slaves which would justify our living there.”(II, 369). While waiting for this project to be realised, he invites his confreres to give missions on the galleys at Marseilles. These missions are remarkably successful; ten Turks are baptised with great ceremony. (II,398).

As a result, the Duchess d’Aiguillon, niece of Cardinal Richelieu who made the de Gondi family relinquish the post of General of the Galleys, makes St. Vincent decide to make a foundation in Marseilles, on July 25, 1653. This house will have four missionaries who will look after the prisoners but they will also go to Barbary “whenever they think the time is right.” (XIII, 300).¹⁰ In order to promote such an enterprise she buys the consulate in Algiers and then the one in Tunis, so that the missionaries will find it easier to establish themselves in those places.

¹⁰ In 1649, St. Vincent will explain the strategic importance of this house in Marseilles: *“It is on our route and is half way on the journey to Rome: it is a seaport where we can embark for Italy and the Levant, a very convenient departure point for the Company. The missionaries there are concerned with the relief and the salvation of the poor prisoners, both the sick and the healthy ones, and look after the affairs of the Barbary captives.”* (XII, 149)

In a letter written on February 25, 1654, Saint Vincent explains to the Ambassador in Turkey, Monsieur de la Haye-Vantelay, the aim of this operation.: *“We committed ourselves six or seven years ago to assist poor Christian slaves in Barbary spiritually and corporally, in sickness and in health. For this purpose we have sent there several of our confreres, who strive to encourage them to persevere in our holy religion, endure their captivity for the love of God and work out their salvation in the midst of the trials they are undergoing.....To facilitate this good work, they had to be placed in the beginning with the Consuls as their chaplains for fear that the Turks might not allow them to practise our holy religion.”* (V, 84)

A wide range of projects

If it turns out that the consular posts in Algiers and Tunis are the only ones that are actually created, St. Vincent still has very many projects in mind for missions in Islamic countries. At Sale, that infamous hotbed of corsairs not far from Rabat in Morocco,¹¹ and peopled mostly by Moors who were expelled from Spain in 1610, the French consul asks for a missionary to be sent. St. Vincent sends Jacques Le Soudier but the missionary gets no further than Marseilles because he is ousted by a Recollect Father. (III, 35, 69, 72, 81-82)

Later on, St. Vincent is asked by Propaganda Fide to send a missionary to Persia. Discussions go on from 1643 (II, 413-415) to 1648 (III, 380) without any concrete results, in spite of the goodwill of St. Vincent who is ready to make the greatest sacrifices for the project. In March 1647, he has no hesitation in proposing his assistant, Lambert aux Couteaux as candidate for the bishopric in Babylon: *“I must confess, Excellency”*, he writes to Bishop Ingoli, secretary of Propaganda Fide, *“that losing this person is like plucking out one of my own eyes or cutting off my arm.”* (III, 158).

Throughout 1648, St. Vincent himself is thinking of sending missionaries to Arabia. In his petition to Propaganda Fide he explains: *“Since the three parts of Arabia known as Arabia Felix, Arabia Petrea and Arabia Deserta have not yet been assigned to any religious Order or secular priests, to be evangelised and led to the Christian faith, Vincent Depaul, Superior of the Congregation of the Mission, offers to send several of his priests to these parts of Arabia.”* (III, 336). Later on, in 1656, he is asked by Propaganda to send a priest to Lebanon. (VI, 19). He thinks of sending Edme Jolly but finally decides on Thomas Berthe *“who, it is true, is not as learned”* but has shown that *“he is very prudent and pious.”* (VI, 24). This plan will come to nothing. Indeed, at this very time, the Jesuits are settling in Mount Lebanon, at Antora, having been invited there by Sheikh Abou-Naufal el-Khazen.

¹¹ These pirates do not hesitate to go on raiding expeditions even as far away as Iceland. In 1627 they pillage the town of Reykjavik (cf. Bartolome et Lucile Ba-ennassar, “Les chretiens d’Allah. L’histoire extraordinaire des renegats, XVI et XVII siecles”, Perrin, 1989, p. 397 ff)

By a curious twist in history, the Lazarists will replace the Jesuits in 1783 and build Saint Joseph's College there.

Mission in the Islamic countries

So we have to recognise that prior to the great mission to Madagascar which will start in 1648, almost all St. Vincent's missionary projects were directed to Islamic countries. How can we do otherwise than speak of his special interest in everything connected with Islam? Abelly, the first biographer of St. Vincent, is on the right track when, after sketching the missionary portrait of the saint, he speaks about the foreign missions that Vincent organised and he starts with the missions in Barbary.¹²

St. Vincent has always considered these missions to be the natural extension of the missions in France. The Rules of the Congregation of the Mission do not deal specifically with the question of foreign missions but state that the aim of the Congregation is "*to preach the gospel to the poor, especially those in country places.*" But St. Vincent is at pains to interpret this for his community. After 1658, the conferences that he gives are meant to explain these Rules. In a conference on the aim of the Company, given on December 6, 1658, St. Vincent eloquently shows that the service of the poor embraces all missions, even those in the most distant places. "*There will be some who argue against these works, you can be sure, and others will say that we are taking on too much by undertaking to send missionaries to far-off countries, to the Indies and to Barbary....It doesn't matter, our vocation is: Evangelizare pauperibus*". (XII, 90). These words are spoken from the heart, so much so that he returns to the subject and passionately condemns in advance those who lack this missionary spirit. "*If it should happen that later on some people were to suggest that we give up this practice, that we abandon this hospital, that we bring back those working in Barbary, that we should stay here and not go to that particular place, that we should abandon this employment and not hasten to relieve the needs of people in far-off places....at this point St. Vincent is so overcome with emotion that he bursts out: "such people are libertines, libertines, who seek nothing but their own pleasure and provided they have enough to eat they are not bothered about anything else.*" (XII, 92).

Moreover, notwithstanding many external pressures, and in spite of the insistent demands of some of his confreres, in spite of financial losses and losing personnel, in spite of humiliations of every kind and some moments of discouragement (for example, VI, 331 and VII, 230), St. Vincent will refuse to call a halt to the missions in Barbary. And he does not fail to rekindle the missionaries' zeal saying: "*Who would not offer to go to Madagascar, to Barbary, to Poland, or*

¹² P. Coste, on the other hand, in his biography "Le grand saint du grand siècle, Monsieur Vincent", Desclee de Brouwer, 1931, 3 vol. deals with the mission to Barbary as just one more work in the catalogue of relief given to mendicants, prisoners and galley slaves.

to any other place where God wishes to be served by the Company?" (XII, 241 or XI, 411).

St. Vincent's consideration for Muslims

St. Vincent has some knowledge of Islam and he respects this religion. When speaking about the Turks he does not, as a rule, use derogatory terms. Yet this is an age where the worst insult you can offer someone is to call him a Turk and we see this in the list of epithets used by Sganarelle in Moliere's play *Don Juan*: "*the greatest scoundrel , a madman, a dog, a devil, a Turk!*"

In spite of the terrible ordeals that Jean Barreau or Philippe Le Vacher have to suffer at the hands of the Turks, St. Vincent never speaks of the latter in derogatory terms. He even goes so far as to recognise that the public humiliations heaped on these missionaries were often caused by a lack of prudence on the part of his confreres. On June 22, 1657, he writes: "*The Consul in Tunis (Martin Husson) has been sent back to France by the Dey and the Consul in Algiers (Jean Barreau) has been sent to prison by the public administration , unjustly but not without cause.*" (VI, 330). He recognises how difficult it is to avoid such harassment which comes from the corruption and the fickleness of the people in charge of such places, and he writes to Brother Barreau: "*The restoration of the former Pasha will make you understandably afraid that he will treat you as harshly as he did before and the various trials you are suffering at present will eventually overwhelm you. I tell you that I am deeply grieved at all the ordeals that have come your way and the fact that I cannot see how to relieve your suffering unless Providence helps you in some extraordinary way.*" (VI, 7).

Some writers go so far as to say that if St. Vincent never speaks about his captivity, and if in 1660 he tries to destroy the letters that mention it, this is because the letters describe his captivity in terms that are rather benign and anodyne. In 1660 it is not the time to talk like this about his captivity because preparations are now in hand for an expedition to liberate the wretched captives in Algiers. St. Vincent gives his complete support to this armed expedition against the Turks. He rejoices "*at Commander Paul's proposal to go to Algiers and obtain justice from the Turks.*" (VII, 78). The final clause is a good indication of his feelings on the matter. It is not a question of organising a new Crusade but of seeing that the established conventions are better respected and that the captives are freed. At this time relations between France and the countries dependent on the Grand Porte are at a low ebb. Mention is made of "*the imprisonment of the Ambassador to Constantinople and the ill treatment handed out to the Consuls of Alexandria, Alep and Tripoli by the Turks.*" (VII, 259). At the same time St. Vincent writes to Philippe Le Vacher in Marseilles, expressing his anguish: "*You do not mention anything about Algiers or Tunis; is there no word of them in Marseilles? O God,*

protect our poor confreres. I beg you, Monsieur, to send me news if you have any.”
(VII, 396)

His knowledge of Islam

St. Vincent's precise and sometimes profound knowledge of Islam is astonishing. It is true that he has his sources of information. The missionaries in Algeria and Tunis keep up a regular correspondence with him. At that time the local Superiors used to write to their Superior General nearly every week. (II, 236, 452; VII, 249, 504...). Packets of letters arrive at Saint-Lazare. (V, 135). People do not hesitate to resort to various strategies and to send letters by different means in order to overcome the difficulties inherent in sending them. The reports that are sent are detailed and often they are quite long. St. Vincent is so prudent that he sometimes advises people to send letters in code. He says to Jean Barreau: *“It would be good for us to use a code; I will send you one if you know how to use it.”*(III, 43).

St. Vincent does not lack explanations or clarifications on points of the Islamic faith. He knows from a letter sent by Julien Guerin in Tunis, the reply given by a Turk who had witnessed a dispute among Christians: *“Father, we Turks are not allowed to live for three days in disagreement with our neighbour.”* (III, 25). As well as this, he had numerous close contacts with former captives. Some of these, like Guillaume Servin and Rene Duchesne, were ransomed by Jean Barreau and afterwards entered the Company as Coadjutor brothers.(XI, 189, 203).

That is why St. Vincent is so well-informed about Muslim customs and he knows how difficult it is for a Muslim to be converted because he risks: *“being burnt alive because this is what happens in these countries.”* (XI, 307). He knows that Turks, in common with Indians and Jews never go bareheaded, even when greeting one another. (XI, 273). He knows that people can be condemned as a result of publicly spread rumour. When he wishes to persuade the Ladies of Charity to look after the foundlings, some of whom are sold by unscrupulous persons, he says: *“It is a scandal in Paris that we blame the Turks for selling men like animals.”* (XIII, 775).

His esteem for certain Muslim practices

Strangely enough, St. Vincent does not shy away from using some Muslim customs as examples to be followed by the Daughters of Charity and his own confreres. He has no hesitation in saying: *“The Turks are better people than many Christians.”* (X, 470). When speaking of our duty to practise reconciliation he recalls the conversation mentioned above which took place between Julien Guerin and a Turk who declared: *“Oh, we act in a very different manner because we never*

let the sun go down on our anger.” And St. Vincent concluded: “That is what the Turks do. And so a Daughter of Charity who cherishes a certain coldness in her heart towards her neighbour and who does not go to the trouble of being reconciled is worse than the Turks.” (X, 470).

Some months later, on November 15, 1657, he used the example of the Turks to persuade the Daughters of Charity not to drink wine “*except in the case of invalids or the very old.*” He said: “*Believe me, Sisters, it is a great advantage never to drink wine. The Turks never drink it, although they live in a very warm country and they are far healthier than people here who do, which shows that wine is not so necessary to life as people think. Ah! if it was not so common we should not see so much disorder. Isn’t it a great pity that the Turks, and all who live in Turkey, which has an area of ten thousand miles, the equivalent of one hundred and fifty of our leagues, live without wine and that Christians use it so excessively!*” (X, 360-361). And St. Vincent draws the following conclusion: “*And hence Turks are so composed in their manner that they cannot bear anyone who talks in a loud voice.*”

This last example was used almost two years earlier when St. Vincent was speaking to the Priests of the Mission during repetition of prayer: “*You see that in certain towns such as Constantinople, for example, there are police...to go round and check on those who speak too loudly and make too much noise...and if they find someone who gets carried away and speaks too loudly, there and then and without more ado they make him lie stretched out on the pavement and they beat him twenty or thirty times with their batons. Now these Turks act in this way purely out of fear of the police, with what more reason should we not act in this way out of virtue.*” (XI, 212). Presenting the Turks in this way is a far cry from the way Moliere was pleased to present them as buffoons at the end of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

Examples to be followed

On occasions St. Vincent recognises the true value of charitable actions performed by non-Christians. He reminds the Daughters of Charity that the service of the poor has to extend to “*spiritual assistance.*” Indeed, there is nothing specifically Christian about giving corporal help. “*A Turk, an idolator, can give aid for the body. That is why Our Lord would not have instituted a Company solely for that, since natural considerations alone would oblige us to act in this way.*” (X, 334). He explains to the missionaries, too, that there is a natural wisdom that is universal: “*This does not mean to say that in the world there are not good sayings, adages that are not opposed to Christian maxims, as, for example, the saying: “Do good and you will find good”. That is true, the pagans and the Turks accept that and nobody would disagree.*” (XII, 273). On another occasion he agrees that it is a natural impulse to do good and help others: “*Even the Turks, who have no*

knowledge of God, are obliged to act in this way and if I had no other knowledge I would be obliged by natural law to behave like this." (X, 329).

St. Vincent is even more daring when he uses the example of Muslims to urge the Sisters to say the rosary and he gives them this encouragement: "*Now if Turks have some sort of devotion to the Rosary, is it not reasonable that you should have a great devotion towards the Blessed Virgin?*" Before coming to that conclusion he explains how the Muslims say their rosary: "*The Turks, themselves, realised that this form of prayer is so beautiful that some of them wear a rosary round their neck and others wear it as a scarf. Oh! do you know how they say the Rosary? They do not say, as we do, the Pater and the Ave, because they do not believe in Our Lord and do not regard Him as their Lord, although they have a great respect for Him, for Him and for the Blessed Virgin, and have it to such a degree that if they hear anyone blaspheming against Our Lord they put him to death. So they take their beads and say: 'Allah, Allah, my God, my God, have pity on me; just God, merciful God, almighty God.' Those are the epithets they apply to Him.*"(X, 621).

Nobody could be more precise. St. Vincent understands the meaning of the word Allah. He knows that the Muslim rosary is made up of 99 beads, each one spelling out a name for God. The three invocations to God who is just, merciful and powerful are correctly described. More than that, he gives a very fair assessment of Muslim thinking about Jesus and the Virgin Mary in context. Muslims hold that Jesus was born of a Virgin in a miraculous way and they have such a respect for Him that they cannot accept the idea that He died the infamous death of the Cross. (Koran, IV, 157). As for Mary, she is the only woman whose name is cited in the Koran which describes her as 'purified' and 'chosen.'" (Koran, III, 42).

Aim of the mission to Barbary

His knowledge of the world of Islam only serves to make St. Vincent more aware of the conditions under which Christians in Islamic countries have to live. He concedes that "*the Turks think they are offering a sacrifice to God when they persecute them.*"(VII, 326) and he knows that the conversion of Christians to "*the religion of Mohammed serves to bolster the courage of the Turks*".(V, 85). The aid that he wishes to bring to Barbary is both material and spiritual. It is not a question of competing with other Orders such as the Trinitarians and the Mercedarians who only ransom Christian captives. St. Vincent is very explicit about this when he is planning to send missionaries to Algiers. He will say it again some 15 years later during repetition of prayer when he makes reference to a religious Order whose work is the ransoming of captives. "*That is very good, it is excellent, but it seems to me that something more is offered by those who go to Algiers and to Tunis, not simply to ransom poor Christians but also to live there in order to redeem these*

poor people, to assist them corporally and spiritually, to see to their needs and to be always there to help them." (XI, 437).

This is something he had already said in his recommendations to Boniface Nouelly and to Jean Barreau (XIII, 306-307), and in the rule of life he sent to Jean Le Vacher and Martin Husson before they left for Algiers (XIII, 363). St. Vincent keeps faith with his missionary vision. If we are to help the poor we must come close to them so that we can give them spiritual and material help in their misery. In Barbary it is a matter of helping the captives in their distress and strengthening their faith in spite of moral, psychological and even physical pressures to make them apostatise, and to bring them some hope by showing them they are not forgotten.

It is much to St. Vincent's credit that he was able to understand, as though from experience, the deep despair felt by these captives. Letters written by these captives would frequently go astray, either because of problems in delivering them (V, 526-527), or because their families did not want to receive them and for a variety of reasons were unwilling to follow them up. St. Vincent is very anxious that the captives should let people know about them and he assures them that their letters really will arrive at their destination. He often makes parish priests responsible for delivering the letters and for obliging the families to reply

St. Vincent does not fail to admire the faith of these captives and he frequently asks his missionaries to be less demanding with regard to the easy-going and even scandalous behaviour of some of them who cannot accept their misfortune. The recommendations he makes to Philippe Le Vacher, who is by nature a little too impetuous, are very clear on this point and they reveal a most uncommon knowledge of the state of captivity. "*Above all*", he writes to him, "*you must not take it upon yourself to abolish too quickly the customs practised by the captives even if these are bad. I beseech you, therefore, to condescend as far as you can to human frailty; you will win over the slaves who are ecclesiastics more by sympathising with them than by rebukes and correction. It is not light but strength that they need.*" (IV, 121) On occasions St. Vincent praises some martyrs like young Pierre Borguny, a native of Majorca, who was burnt alive in Algiers for returning to the Christian faith. His body will be brought back to Paris in 1657 through the efforts of Philippe Le Vacher (V, 342). St. Vincent mentions him in his letters (V, 341) and in his conferences. (XI, 389-392).

Mission to the Muslims

St. Vincent's missionary interest is not, however, limited to the captives. He also has the Muslim people in mind. It is true that he is extremely prudent and that he gives his missionaries precise instructions on this point: "*They will be subject*", he says, "*to the laws of the country, except those that concern religion, on which subject let them never dispute or say anything in contempt of it.*" (XIII, 307, 364).

He calls to order Philippe Le Vacher who is sometimes inclined to be over zealous: *“You have another reef to avoid in your dealings with the Turks and renegades: in the name of Our Lord, have no communications with these people.....It is easier and more important to stop many slaves apostatising than to convert one single renegade. A doctor who preserves us from an illness is more meritorious than one who cures us of it.”* (IV, 121-122).

St. Vincent is opposed to all extremes in preaching. However, the time is not far distant when certain missionaries, particularly some of the sons of St. Francis, will act rashly in their desire for martyrdom. In Constantinople, one such man was the Capuchin, St. Joseph of Leonessa, from the monastery of Saint-Benoit which is today occupied by the Lazarists. In 1587 he forces an entry into the seraglio in an attempt to convert the Sultan Murad III. Miraculously delivered from many forms of torture, he dies a peaceful death in Italy in 1612.¹³ St. Vincent must have heard his confreres from the mission in Leonessa speak about this man. (VIII, 31, 127). Joseph de Leonessa was beatified in 1737, six days after the canonisation of St. Vincent.

Does this mean that St. Vincent is opposed to all missionary contact with the Muslim people? If he is against any direct religious contact this is not a matter of principle but of prudence. The mission to the poor slaves is not to be put in jeopardy for the sake of a few conversions that may not always be genuine. St. Vincent says as much to Philippe Le Vacher when he asks him to moderate his zeal.(IV, 121-123). However, if it sometimes happens that a person is converted, St. Vincent never criticises this even though unpleasant consequences may ensue, as in the case of the son of the Bey of Tunis. He writes to Antoine Portail: *“The work of Father Guerin, in Tunis, continues to be blessed. He has escaped from great danger following the conversion of the king’s son who escaped with five or six others of his entourage and they made their way to Sicily where they were baptised. Poor Father Guerin was imprisoned for a month, on suspicion of having a hand in the affair and he expected to be taken away at any minute and burnt alive; something he was sure would happen.”* (II, 622). St. Vincent simply recommends them to practise the utmost discretion and he gives his reasons for this in a letter to Jean Barreau in Algiers. He advises him *“never to write or to speak about conversions out there and, more importantly, to have nothing to do with conversions that are against the law in that country. You have reason to fear lest a person may feign conversion in order to stir up trouble.”*(III, 42)

The universal dimension of the mission

In St. Vincent’s mind the mission is a unified whole. Evangelisation has to be addressed to Christians in order to strengthen their faith, and also to people who do not yet know about the Christian religion and call these to conversion. The

¹³ Article” Joseph de Leonessa” in the Encyclopedia of Catholicism, Volume IV, section 1002

missionaries in Barbary are to concern themselves with all people but they need to keep certain priorities in mind. Speaking about the Turks, St. Vincent refers to a report sent by “*a Priest of the Mission sent there for the conversion of the infidels.*” (X, 470). Nothing could be more explicit. He often uses the term “the poor” to include all those who need his ministry, whether they are Christians or not. “*The truth is*”, he writes to Etienne Blatiron, “*that they will do good among the poor and the captives in a foreign country if they are happy to do the same among the poor and afflicted here.*” (III, 337).

He says something similar to Jacques de La Fosse who has reservations about being responsible for the Daughters of Charity: “*The virtue of mercy is exercised in various ways and it has led the Company into different ways of serving the poor, witness the service it renders to the galley slaves and to the captives in Barbary.*” (VIII, 238) And when he speaks about “*the conversion of poor nations*” he is explicitly referring to the Indies, Japan and Barbary. (XI, 291).

St. Vincent’s interest in Islamic countries stems from the attraction that these places had for him personally, but there are also theological reasons for it and on several occasions he reminds others that the Pope “*has the power to send ecclesiastics to all parts of the world for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.*” (II, 51. See also III, 154, 158, 182; XI, 421). For him, the official recognition of the Congregation of the Mission by the Holy See, means they must have a worldwide vision of the mission. “*Our vocation*”, St. Vincent reminds his confreres, “*is not simply to go into a parish, or a diocese, but to go all over the world.*” (XII, 262).

He is preoccupied with the way that heresies, particularly the heresy of Protestantism are spreading, and he wonders, too, whether the future of Christianity does not lie with non-Christian countries. “*Who is to say,*” he confides to Jean Dehorgny, “*that God is not calling us to Persia? How do we know that God is not thinking of moving the Church itself to infidel countries where the people are perhaps more blameless than many Christians who possess nothing less than the sacred mysteries of our religion? I have had this feeling for a long time.*” (III, 153 and 154. Cf III, 35, and XI, 309).

St. Vincent’s pastoral theology

St. Vincent’s desire for the Company to be missionary is supported and made explicit in his teaching that reflects this dimension. It has to be remembered that his pastoral theology is based on the mystery of the Incarnation. The first recommendation that he makes to the missionaries on their way to Tunis and to Algiers is related to this mystery: “*They should have a particular devotion to the*

mystery of the Incarnation, by which Our Lord came down on earth to help us in the bondage we are kept captive in by the evil spirit." (XIII, 306). So it is only natural that their mission should be to bring spiritual and corporal relief to all Christian slaves. We see here St. Vincent's original intuition, which is that the best way to combat heresy in the country parts of France is to strengthen the faithful in the practice of their own religion. This requires prudence and patience. St. Vincent recommends Jean Barreau, *"to take every conceivable precaution so as not to give the Turks any reason for oppressing you."* (VI, 135).

On the other hand, the missionary must not feel that he is responsible for everything beyond his own zeal, and St. Vincent reminds Philippe Le Vacher that the reason he is being sent to Algiers to bring relief to the captives. He tells him, however, *"you are not, as you seem to think, responsible for their salvation"*. (IV, 120). He gives the same reassurance to Philippe's brother in Tunis: *"God does not ask you to do more than He gives you the means of doing."* (VII, 506). In other cases, if it is not possible to take any action or to be successful, he advises commending the enterprise to God. This is the advice he gives to Jean Barreau: *"We have to keep our souls in peace and adore God's power in our weakness."* (VI, 7). Or again: *"After you have done all in your power to prevent a Christian from going astray, you should seek consolation in Our Lord who could prevent this misfortune but it is not His will to do so."* (V, 31).

St. Vincent's missionary teaching

This being said, it remains the goal of a missionary to convert all people to the Catholic faith. St. Vincent, therefore, in keeping with the thinking of St. Francis de Sales, recognises that not everyone shares the Christian religion, but he would refuse to impose this by force. A religion of love can only be spread by persuasion. Confronted from his earliest days with the tensions caused by Protestantism, he has a sense of religious pluralism and respect for people's conscience. That is why he asks his missionaries to avoid all polemics or any action that could be misinterpreted. His teaching on how they are to act is very clear. Let us recall his instructions to them: *"They will be subject to the laws of the country except those that concern religion; on which subject let them never dispute or say anything in contempt of it."* (XIII, 307). We could take as applying to the mission to Muslims, St. Vincent's words about Protestants: *"They should be mindful"*, he writes to the missionaries at Richelieu, *"that they are not sent there for the heretics, but for poor Catholics, and yet, if an opportunity comes their way to instruct a heretic, they should do so with meekness and humility, showing that their words spring from compassion and not indignation."* (I, 429).

St. Vincent speaks from experience. *"I have never seen, never known"*, he declares, *"any heretic who has been converted by force of argument or by subtle reasoning."* (XI, 66). The reason for this is that *"we do not believe a man because*

he is learned but because we think he is good and we love him." (1, 295). That is why the primary evangelisation must be one of witness. The missionary can do a lot by doing the good work that is within his scope. St. Vincent believes in the importance of example. This is the foundation of his missionary theology that is firmly anchored in the Incarnation. We have to imitate Christ who *"began with actions and then proceeded to teach."* This maxim characterises the introduction to the Common Rules of the Priests of the Mission and constitutes their originality. Writing to Firmin Get, the Superior at Marseilles, who is beginning to have doubts about the value of the work in Barbary, St. Vincent says: *"Even if no other good were to come out of these situations than to reveal to that wretched land the beauty of our religion by sending there men who cross the seas, who willingly leave their own country and comforts and subject themselves to a thousand outrages for the consolation of their afflicted brothers, I feel that the men and the money would be well spent."*(VII, 117).

So every time that the good works done are recognised as such, St. Vincent is ever ready to rejoice: *"Our men in Barbary give such edification, by the grace of God, that the Pasha of Tripoli, in Barbary, is asking for someone to do as they do; he even offers to write to the King about it."* (V, 178). Or again, during a conference, he spoke about Jean le Vacher and said: *"When he returned to Tunis , the Dey declared that this man would go to heaven because of all the alms he bestowed...You see how he made even the infidels respect our religion."* (XI, 449). And he went on to say: *"This is what I was told by his brother, Fr. Philippe Le Vacher, who when he was asked how the Turks responded to our religion, said that they were too barbaric to appreciate spiritual things but he respected them for their external things and ceremonies, and he even went so far as to borrow their tapestries for our solemn ceremonies."*¹⁴ (XI, 449).

The conclusion that St. Vincent draws is one that is still relevant today: *"Oh Saviour!"* he exclaims, *Oh Priests of the Mission! Oh all of us who are members of the Mission! we can do likewise and we can lead people to respect our holy faith by living according to God's will and imitating our good Fr. Le Vacher."* (XI, 449).

(Translator: Sr. Joyce Howard, D.C)

¹⁴ St. Vincent does well to recognise the importance of religious ceremonies and liturgical hymns as ways of expressing the Christian faith. He attributes his liberation from slavery in Tunis to *"some hymns of praise I sang in the presence"* one of the wives of his master. (I, 10). In our own times we know the profound effect that eastern liturgies with their chants and their ceremonial worship can have on some Muslims.

Monotheism and Trinity

The problem of God and Man and its implications for life in our society

By Fr. Khalil Samir S.J.

I am somewhat embarrassed, not knowing how to approach this subject. My embarrassment arises from the fact that, in truth, there are two distinct subjects which one would like to connect together: on the one hand the question of God, in Islam and in Christianity (and as a consequence the concepts of absolute monotheism and Trinitarian monotheism); and on the other hand, the question of humanity in Islam and in Christianity.

Because of this, it would be preferable to treat the subject in two stages: first of all, the concept that each religion has of God; then, what effect this concept has on the family, on society, on culture and on politics. What are the implications of this concept of God for life as it is lived.

If I have divided my subject in this way, the division may seem simple but the subject is huge. Effectively from the theological point of view two entirely distinct methods are required.

The question that many people frequently ask me is the following: “Do we adore the same God as Christians and Muslims? Have Christians and Muslims the same God?”

I am always embarrassed by this question. It is evident that there is but one God whom we all call Allah. When as Muslims and Christians we speak of God, by that very fact we are speaking of the same God. On the other hand however, it is certain that our understanding of God, our concept of God is not the same. One can say then that we all adore the same God, however, we understand him differently.

I. Introduction: One God

The three monotheistic faiths Judaism, Christianity and Islam are linked culturally. It is not by chance that the tradition of the Catholic Church groups these three religions under the heading of monotheism and distinguishes them from other beliefs in God. In fact, in these three religions we find a unique God, creator of everything that exists (whether it is a question of good or evil) and a personal God, (that is to say who has a personal relationship with humanity). As far as I know, one does not find these three constituent elements of a monotheistic God (unique, creator/creating and personal) in any other religion. It is because of this that one can

only speak of monotheism with regard to these three religions, and one could say that what you are dealing with is a monotheism in three different forms.

Furthermore, the three religions claim a common bond or a common origin in relation to a certain number of shared personages. In particular, the three religions recognise Abraham as being their father in the faith. Besides this common father (but which they do not recognise as their common existence!), they declare themselves to be related to numerous biblical figures: Adam, Abel, Noah, Moses etc. The last mentioned religions (Christianity and Islam) also recognise Jesus as an outstanding character sent by God.

The tradition common to the three religions is the biblical tradition. For the Jews, this common foundation is the Old Testament only; for Christians and Muslims, this foundation includes the New Testament (at least in theory). For Muslims the Koran is also included.

It is this (inclusiveness) which explains, let it be said in passing, how the Muslims consider themselves as the logical extension and completion of monotheism in the tradition of Abraham. They see their religion as being perfect since it encompasses all that God revealed in the Old Testament and the New Testament and it adds further elements from the Koran which rectify and complement earlier revelations.

This attitude also explains the belief that all Muslims have of not only belonging to the most perfect religion but also to the most tolerant religion which welcomes in the Koran not only the prophets of Judaism and Christianity but even those of Paganism. In reality, whoever studies the text of the Koran with care realises that behind this language or the common vocabulary an enormous difference is revealed as regards the interpretation of these texts, so much so, that behind these shared figures a huge difference is observed not only in the understanding of their role but also in the content of their message.

I have not the time to develop this point. I merely cite one example: the Muslims say of Jesus that he is the “Word of God” (Kalimat Allah); they add also (something which is not in the New Testament) that he is “The Spirit of God” (ruh Allah). They say that he was born of the Mary and the Holy Spirit (ruh al-Qudus) (or literally Holy Spirit, in conformity to the Syriac Tradition) and they recognise that he was not born of a man of a father. However, they in the most definite way do not give to these essential Christian terms the meaning that they have in Christianity. They do this not out of malevolence nor out of a desire to misrepresent Christianity but simply because this is how they have understood these terms.

There is then one can see a very important common foundation, but also one that is ambiguous, because under these common terms we see different realities. In

fact, it is more deceiving to use these common terms with their different understandings than to use different terms.

II. Three Approaches to God

I come back then to the point I was making namely that the three faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam recognise a God who is one, a Creator and a personal God. It is equally true that on the other hand, the concept that each of the three faiths has of God is different.

1. The Jewish understanding of God

a) The understanding in primitive Judaism

For the Jews, it is the Almighty who chose for himself a people to be his messenger his spokesperson for humanity, a people whom he liberates from slavery (an historical fact, recorded in the book of Exodus) and whom he accompanies during its travels to the Promised Land (the forty years in the desert) and all during its history. We are dealing therefore with an historic personal relationship between God and a people, his people. This same God reveals himself through his prophets, that is to say through his messengers whose mission it is to make known the true face of God and to prepare this people to welcome and recognise the promised Messiah, he who would liberate his people (and all people also) in a definitive way.

This idea of the Messiah, which is essential for Christianity which is derived from it, would evolve bit by bit. In early times, the Messiah is conceived as a liberator, in the political sense of that word. Little by little, through the vicissitudes of history, because of defeats and disappointments, because of exile and deportation, the notion of Messiah would undergo an evolution in meaning.

b) The Spiritualisation of this vision at the hands of the later prophets

From a political Messiah, the Messiah who is king and liberator, we pass to a Messiah who has a moral and spiritual mission, because there is no longer a king, the kingdom is destroyed, royalty has been abolished and the people deported. So with the later prophets begins a spiritual vision of the Messiah.

Christianity comes and grafts itself onto this last stage of the Judaic vision. It is the logical progression of what the prophets have announced. It is easy to see that salvation, which is conceived as the fruit of the gift of God, but also the fruit of the practice of the Law in all its details (in this understanding of salvation, it is the literal practice of the Law which saves humanity) which will evolve little by little towards an interiorisation of the Law (we know the beautiful texts of Jeremiah "I

will write my Law in their hearts. I will change their hearts of stone into hearts of flesh”): it is no longer the stone tablets of the law which saves humanity, but the interiorised Law. This will become the vision of the New Testament.

So then, the prophets evolve their vision with the people and move towards a spiritualisation of Judaism, of the Law and of the idea of Messiah, they also evolve towards a spiritualisation of the idea of God who no longer appears like a military chief (the God of the armies, Yahweh Sabaoth) but who is personal and has a personality, a God who speaks to the heart (“I will lead her out to the desert and will speak to her heart to heart”). Yet God keeps certain characteristics of the primitive God, he is omnipotent, vengeful, victorious, he crushes, he does what he wills (“I am merciful to those I choose and I punish those I choose!”) He reveals himself to Israel as a father, or rather a mother, who takes his people on his knee (a biblical expression).

It is easy to see how the prophets, these messengers of God change and make the people change towards a spiritualisation of the fundamental ideas of Judaism. This vision does not contradict the primitive notion but it is quite different.

This explains the broad welcome given to Christ when he appears and his recognition by many as the Messiah they had been expecting. If there had not been a prophetic movement in the previous centuries of Judaism, Christ would not have been recognised as the longed for Messiah. On the other hand, this spiritual evolution in understanding was the result of a personal reading of the Bible by the Jews and the recognition of the Christ, as the Messiah who had been announced and hoped for, would also be a personal acceptance by individuals. When one takes this into account one can understand how the majority of Jews would refuse to recognise Christ as the expected Messiah whilst a minority would recognise him. This is the concept of God that Judaism offers.

c) A God inserted into the history of a people and of the world

But this God is also inserted into the history of a people and through that of the world. I underline this point, because it seems to me capital in the Judeo-Christian vision, whilst it is practically absent from Islam. The fact that biblical revelation is spread over centuries, that Abraham lived 1900 years before Christ and that there is then a continual evolution throughout the Book that is called the Bible, gives to Jews (and as a consequence to Christians) an understanding of revelation which is in perpetual evolution, and not a fixed vision of revelation.

This is absolutely opposed to the Muslim understanding of revelation, where the Arabic word used is *tanzil* which means “descent”. For the Muslims, the Koran actually “descended” on Muhammad, who only had to retransmit it orally, because the original of the Koran (*umm al-Kitab*), according to the Muslims, is written in heaven, whence it descended on Muhammad. The latter had only to retransmit it to

his people, in little sections according to their needs. The text of the Koran is presented then as a solid block which does not allow any change or evolution. This idea one suspects has considerable consequences for the daily life of Muslims, preventing them from interpreting the sacred text according to the knowledge and needs of the present time.

2. The Christian understanding of God

a) Christianity is an interiorising continuation of the Old Testament

For Christians everything that has been said of Judaism remains, without doubt true. There can be no question of eliminating any element whatsoever of the biblical tradition of the Old Testament. I say that because we find often in the history of the Church, sects who try to eliminate some elements of the Old Testament, indeed some who reject it totally. Even in the Lebanon this tendency is very obvious amongst those in the Syrian Socialist Party (PSS) who simply reject the Old Testament considering it absolutely barbaric.

Having accepted that nothing in the Old Testament can be rejected (and this is an indisputable truth of faith), Christianity is presented then as an interiorising continuation of the Old Testament. In other terms, it is true that God is the all-powerful one and even the avenging God, who does what He wishes when He wishes. But, the emphasis is not on these ideas; the emphasis is on the idea of God as Father; so much so that the only Aramaic word retained in the New Testament to designate God is the word "Abba" which the apostles and the disciples (and Paul mystically) heard from the mouth of Christ himself. The apostles recorded this word just as it was spoken, adding the Greek translation, probably because they had been astonished by it; they had heard Christ addressing God by calling him "abba" father. What intimacy is signified by this name!

b) The God of Jesus Christ is revealed as God the Father, the God of love

The God of Jesus-Christ is revealed then as God the father, the God of love. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son" (John 3:16). St. John will even give this definition of God, "God is love" (1 John). God is revealed then to us as the God does everything through love, who creates the world through love, who becomes incarnate through love, who give himself to us on the cross through love. And this love continues every day, in what we call Divine Providence, which accompanies us throughout life. The essential characteristic is that this God has done everything through love, from the creation of the world until the present moment, because he is Love. This point for me is primary.

c) Henceforth, God does not reveal himself to the world through the prophets but, through his only Son.

Henceforth, God does not reveal himself to the world through the prophets, since the mission of the prophets was to make known the true face of God to the world and also to prepare the world to recognise the Messiah. Now the Messiah is here and the Kingdom is already amongst us.

The only prophet of the New Testament, according to Christ himself, is John the Baptist. For Christians he is the last and the crowning of the prophets. After him there can be no more prophets. In effect, John the Baptist not only announces the Christ like all the prophets of the Old Testament, but he also points him out with his finger “Here is the Lamb of God!” a gesture of which the Roman liturgy will remind us at every Eucharist: “Behold the Lamb of God”. From now on, the era of the prophets is over, and that is what the two disciples of John the Baptist understand when they abandon him to follow Christ, with the blessing of John.

The last of the prophets was John the Baptist, God will no longer reveal himself to the world by his prophets, but by his only Son, who is his actual Word, who is the promised and hoped for Messiah. John the Baptist is the last of the prophets, who points out the Messiah and announces that the Kingdom of God is from now on present.

d) Christ is the actual Word of God, his good news.

Christ does not present himself as a prophet, it is the Jews who sometimes give him this name. He recognises himself on the contrary as the Messiah. He is not the spokesperson of God (as prophets are) but the actual Word of God. John the Evangelist understands this well when he dares to use this term to designate God. It is without doubt the first time in the history of humanity that someone uses the term “Word of God” to personify someone. The Word has become flesh, a person and a man.

Christ himself is then the actual revelation of God, and not the transmitter of his word. He is the message and the messenger. It is this which explains how the Gospels which are the “Good News” of God, the *Bushra*, are centred on Christ since He is this Good News.

There is here a fundamental difference with Islam, which does not at all understand the Gospels. Indeed, the traditional Muslim, if he happens to read the Gospel, has a double reaction: on the one hand he appreciates its teaching notably the teaching sections where Christ speaks of God and the Kingdom; on the other hand and at the same time, he considers that this could not be the actual word of God sent down to Jesus.

In effect, our Gospels appear a little like a biography of Christ: and that corresponds for him to the *Sirah Nabawiyyah*, to the biography of Muhammad of which several editions exist from the second to the eighth centuries. Now these biographies are not evidently inspired by God. This is why the Muslims are shocked when we tell them that our Gospels are the revealed word of God. It is one of the reasons which makes them say that we have falsified or distorted our scriptures (*tahrif al-Ingil*), because a revelation should contain only the words pronounced by God.

But precisely, if the Gospel is presented in this way, as a biography of Christ integrating his deed his gestures and words, it is because the content of the revelation is none other than the person of Christ. In speaking of Christ, I say who is God, I describe him. The very fact that our Gospels are a sort of life of Christ, confirms what the Apostles understood and knew from the beginning that this man Jesus Christ is none other than God revealed in the flesh.

Such is the Christian vision of God. Henceforth, in order to know God, I have to look at Christ, to know Christ is to know “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians).

3. The Muslim concept of God

a) Reworking of the Jewish concept of God adapted to the Arabic context.

The Muslim concept of God is in reality quite close to the Jewish concept. This is explained, I believe, in two ways. First of all culturally, by the fact that the situation of nascent Judaism, with its Bedouin Patriarchs and its twelve tribes, is very close to the cultural milieu of Arabia. Secondly, in the historical sense, by the fact that the Jewish influence was much more in evidence in the life of Muhammad than that of Christianity. Indeed, the Jews were strongly represented at Medina, the prophet’s town, where Muhammad lived for the last ten years of his life from 622 until 632. It is true that he fought against the Jews at Medina in 624, forcing them to convert or to leave the town, it is however none the less true that the message of the Koran and Muslim practices are strongly marked by the influence of Judaism.

Islam then reworks the concept of God which the Jews had, but rethinks it into the cultural context of the Arabic Peninsula. God appears in this concept as an absolute monarch, or rather like the chief of a tribe possessing all power, who is a law unto himself and who decides on his own what is to be done and his decision is indisputable and irrevocable. Just as the chief of a tribe defends his tribe by attacking others if necessary, so God is the God of vengeance and always victorious.

But he is also the one who pardons whomsoever he wills, when he wills; he is merciful to whomsoever he wills because he does not have to render an account

to anybody. He is the all-powerful who inclines towards his subjects (literally those who “submit”). Briefly, he holds the power of the prince who has the right to condemn or to pardon. It is because he is omnipotent (*al-Quadir, al-Gabbar*) that he is also merciful (*al-Rahman, al-Rahim*).

b) The difference between the Merciful One and Father, the weak influence of Christianity.

The notion of the Merciful One is, however, very far from that of Father and still further from that of Mother. I realise this fact with my students of Islamic theology, particularly with those of them who are going to be *imams*: when I introduce Christianity and when I tell them that God is normally called “the Father” and that we always use this title in our habitual prayer, the very one taught to us by Christ (the Our Father), they are shocked. This idea affronts them.

It is seen at this juncture that Christianity had very little of what we might call profound influence on the nascent Islamic faith. It is true that at Mecca Muhammad’s town, there were Christians: whether these were Ethiopians who were so to speak the military guardians of the town, or individuals who had become Christian, we do not know. But, Islamic tradition has it that a cousin of Khadigah (the wife of Muhammad), who was called Waraqah Ibn Nawfal, was a Christian (the Muslims say that he was a bishop, but we are not sure of this fact, because there was no bishop at Mecca). According to this tradition, he was the one who officiated at the marriage of Muhammad and Khadigah, a marriage which remained monogamous and indissoluble until the death of Khadigah (it is an astonishing fact, that Muhammad took no other concubine nor married any other woman during all of this period, and this could be a confirmation of the belief that the marriage had been sealed by Waraqah the Christian). Despite all this, the influence of Christianity on both Islamic law and the Islamic concept of God, seems to be rather weak.

c) God was revealed to Adam to whom he taught Islam the only true religion.

It was God who made Himself known from the beginning to Adam and who taught him total submission to the divine will which is the root meaning of Islam. Islam is the religion which God put into the heart of man in Adam. So much so, that Adam (according to the Koran) was a Muslim, that is, someone who had submitted to God. In the same way, according to the Koran, Abraham and all the prophets were Muslims, as were the Apostles. Jesus was also a Muslim, and when he reappears on Judgement Day he will publicly declare his Islamic faith.

I mention her between brackets, a beautiful Koranic formula: *imma d-din ‘inda Allah al-Islam*, which the Muslims generally translate as “the true religion is Islam”. In an article which I published in honour of Father Maurice Borrmans, I explained this formula in accordance with its etymology which should be rendered “the true religious attitude consists in submitting oneself to God”. Here you see the

enormous difference between two interpretations: the first which is not the original meaning in the Koran, involves the taking of a narrow view in relation to all other religions; whilst the second which does correspond to the original meaning in the Koran, expresses the fundamental attitude of the believer indeed of every believer.

I have explained then that, according to this formula in the Koran, Jesus is the true Muslim, indeed he is the greatest Muslim, because he is the only one who delivers himself totally to God, his Father, who is totally and voluntarily submissive to God, going as far as giving his life, handing over his Spirit, which he had received from God, (using the expression of St. John) on the cross.

This is the Muslim concept of God, and it gives us an idea at the same time of the relationship between humanity and God. In Islam it is the total submission to God which achieves salvation. This submission implies the application of the Divine Law in its tiniest details, the same as in Judaism. This submission is innate in humanity, in Adam. It is why every normal human being is by nature a Muslim. A famous *Hadit* (that is a saying attributed to Muhammad) says “Every human being is born a Muslim, and it is only parents who make him/her a Jew, a Zoroastrian or a Christian.

Another *hadit*, no less famous, goes “*al-islam din al-fitrah*”. The Islamic translation is “Islam is the natural religion, that is to say the religion of the human being as (s)he has been created by God, in the state of nature. The translation which is faithful to the etymology is “The submission to God is the natural attitude”. Here again you see how the interpretation of the word *Islam* and also that of *din* modifies the meaning of the phrase.

In short, for the Muslims, God is the All-Powerful One, the Conqueror, He who expects and receives from humanity adoration and total submission; but He is also the Merciful-One, who pardons whomsoever he wills and as he wills. He made himself known to Adam revealing to him total submission which is Islam and after him to a crowd of prophets known and unknown, notably Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Finally, he revealed himself to Muhammad, who is the “crowning of the prophets” and who brings the perfect form of religion and revelation.

God presents himself as the all-powerful king and absolute monarch.

III. The Trinity

1. Introduction: The Koranic presentation of the Trinity

“De Deo uno et trino”, as we used to say in the past. The Koran (and the Muslims as a result) reproach us for believing in the Trinity. In several places the

Koran repeats this admonition to Christians: “Do not say three, stop, it would be better for you”. It is a threat.

In one case, the Koran specifies the members of this Trinity. They are God, Mary, and Jesus.: "O Jesus, did you say to your disciples: Adore me, me and my mother, next to God? Here is the possible explication of the error. Since Jesus is for Christians the Son of God (which the Koran reproaches them in this passage) and Mary is the mother of Jesus, we can deduce that God and Mary engendered Jesus.

This is understood in the cultural context of Arabia, in which the gods and goddesses come together to produce sons. The goddess is then called a concubine (*sahibah*) in the Koran. We find an allusion to this same mythology in the Bible (in Genesis 6:1-4), where we see the sons of the Gods coming down to earth to mate with the daughters of humankind who were so beautiful so that they might produce giants, the Amalekites (*al-'Amaliqah*). It is against these pagan concepts, in which the Trinity is likened to pagan Arabic myths, that the Koran is reacting. The Trinity is perceived as being a form, somewhat sublime of polytheism, and because of this it is rejected by the Koran.

You can ask yourself why the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this Koranic Trinity whilst the Holy Spirit (*Ruh al Qudus*) is mentioned three times in the Koran . The reason is that the Spirit in the Koran signifies angel or the Angel Gabriel. Therefore in the Koranic narrative of the Annunciation (Coran 3 and 19), a narrative which has great stylistic beauty, it is the Spirit of God who comes to Mary and who dialogues with her. The Spirit is not a disembodied being but an angel, a man of imposing appearance (*insanan sawiyyan*) , as is the case elsewhere in the bible. It is for this reason that in the one and only mention of the Trinity in the Koran, the Spirit makes no appearance.

2. The Trinity as presented to the Muslims

In these conditions how is it possible to get the Muslims to understand that the Trinity is not opposed to Monotheism but in fact is the crowning glory of the concept.

a) Presenting the Christian vision of existence starting with the concept of God as Father and as Love.

My personal theological reflection worked out from the starting point of the Muslim context has led me to find the key to the problem in the words of St. John “God is Love”, words which join the theme of God and Father. The task which is demanded of us is to try to present all of Christian faith and the sacraments, as well as Christian morality, Christian practice and the Christian life, in a word the whole

Christian vision of existence from the unique starting point of God as Father and Love. I would like to explain here the reason for this approach.

The Muslims reproach Christians for having a religion which is too complicated in its dogmas and its general beliefs. Whilst the Muslim when asked what is Islam, can reply by a profession of faith (the *sahadah*) which is contained in a little phrase.

I call to mind an experiment made in Cairo around 1977 in setting of an Islamic-Christian group Al-lha' al-dini: we used meet every month, bishops, priests and Christian laity on one side and imams and lay Muslims on the other, each one explaining to the other his faith. On the occasion of which I speak it was Father Sakis, a Greek Catholic priest from Heliopolis, who was presenting the Christian faith to the Muslims. He was a good theologian who made an accurate summary of Christian dogmas and practice. He presented the principal "mysteries" of the faith (Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption), then the seven sacraments. Now mystery and sacrament are translated in Arabic as '*sirr*' (plural *asrar*) and in Greek *mysterion* (plural *mysteria*) means "mystery" or "secret".

When he had finished his exposition, an imam seated beside me stood up and said: "If I understand correctly, your religion is composed entirely of mysteries (*asrar*) which cannot be understood."

I would have liked to have replied to him that in reality a mystery is not something that cannot be understood, but something, which because of its complexity and its depth one will never fully understand. The more I understand something, the more I discover there is to understand about it. It is like God: the more I advance in the knowledge of God, the more I discover that I have understood nothing about God. God reveals himself as being like a bottomless well an inexhaustible wellspring. In this sense our religion is truly a religion of mysteries because it is an inexhaustible source of life and knowledge.

b) Christianity is a complicated, irrational and idealistic religion

It's nonetheless true that the Muslims reproach us for having a complicated, irrational and idealistic religion.

Complicated because the Christian Credo is much more developed than the Muslim Credo. For the Muslim, it suffices to say "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet", and he is then officially a Muslim. The Christian has first of all to recite the Nicene Credo . Paul VI has even completed this Credo by adding his own elaborated text. The popes indeed like from time to time to add some new dogma.

Irrational, because we say that God is one and God is three, that Christ is God and man, etc. Whilst Islam is a rational and simple religion (they say), Christianity is full of mysteries, recondite and incomprehensible truths.

Idealistic, because Christianity proposes a morality which is very beautiful and very noble, but totally inaccessible, and everyone knows that no-one lives this ideal. "So, they say to us, you reproach Islam for being an easy religion, you reproach us for tolerating polygamy etc. Go and see then what the Western Christians do and how they live: each one has a mistress or a lover outside marriage! Isn't it better to have official polygamy!" Such is the image that Christianity has amongst Muslims.

3. A reflection starting with mediaeval Arabic Christian theology

So then, the question which every Arabic Christian has to ask of himself or herself is: "How can I present my Christian faith (like the *sahadah* of the Muslims) in a simple, clear, rational and realistic way?"

For twenty years, I have been trying to work out a Christian theogony in the Muslim context. The key to it has been given to me by Arab theologians of the ninth to the thirteenth centuries notably: Abu Ra'itah Habib Ibn Hudayfah al-Takriti (a Syrian from Irak, who wrote around 820), the great philosopher Abu Zakariyya Yahya Ibn'Adi (a Syrian from Irak, who wrote around 940), the bishop Bulus al-busi and the theologian Abu al-Fad'il Safiyy al-Dawlah Ibn ai-Assal (both of whom were Copts from Cairo who wrote around 1240). These four authors present the various facets of the Christian faith with one starting point, God is love (Allah is the *Gawwad*, the Good or the Very Generous One, terms which correspond with the Arab philosophers rendition of the Greek *Agathos*). All the Christian dogmas flow from this unique truth.

This is how one might present all that relying on these diverse authors.

a) Why did God create the world? Out of love

The point of departure which is common to Christians and Muslims is that God is the unique creator of everything that exists. Accepting this, the question is then asked: Why did God create the world? Is it because he needed humanity, because he was lacking something? That is not God's way! That is unthinkable: God is self-sufficient. Did he create without any particular aim like a game (*abatan*), as the Koran says, the expression which one finds amongst ancient Arab Christian thinkers)? That is not God's way! He does nothing without a motive.

Then, why did God create the world and humanity in particular: If it cannot be through need, nor for a joke, nor for no particular reason, it can only be out of

goodness, love, affection mercy, compassion etc. There are several Arab terms used to express the motive for creation: *rahmah, rafah, hanan, tahannun, wudd, gud*, etc.

This last mentioned word *gud* is the most frequently used. It corresponds both to word *agatheia* of the Greek philosophers and to the word *love* of the Christian thinkers. The terms *hubband mahabbah*, which are habitually used today by Christians especially the latter term are hardly ever found in the vocabulary of the Christian mediaeval Arab thinkers. The reason is that these terms are not used by the Muslims to speak of God, even if it is true that you occasionally find in the Koran the verb *ahabba* applied to God, and that the first term, *hubb*, has in current usage a very human meaning, sometimes even sensual (on the other hand, the term *mahabbah* corresponds to the notion of charity, of spiritual love).

So then, if God created the universe and humanity in particular, it could only out of kindness and love. Indeed further, the entire universe having been created for humanity which has been put in charge of it, we have a further sign of the love of God the Creator for us: God has done everything with humanity in mind.

b) God is by nature, Good, Generous and Loving

Having arrived at this conclusion, a new question is posed; This love of the Creator for humanity does it show only at the moment of creation, in the creative act? Is God Loving, Good and Generous (in Arabic *Gawwad*) only when he creates: Could you imagine that God did not have these attributes before creating and had them only at the precise moment when he was creating? That is absurd. Therefore one is obliged to conclude that God is by nature Loving, Good and Generous (*Gawwad*), that his very nature, his deepest meaning, his essence, is to love. He is then in himself Love, independent of humanity and of the creative act.

We discover then progressively that God is Love, *al-Gawwad*, which is precisely the Christian perspective on God. But then, how does God discover his nature, the fact even that he is Love, before creating? Love is by definition sharing and exchanging. But if there is no-one with whom God can share? If there isn't yet a human being, how does God discover the sharing of love? From this question you come naturally to the Trinity: God is Love because he shares his internal gift. He has no need of anything or of anyone to give himself to or to share with. This gift is internal to himself without being an egoist or an egocentric. It is the circulation of love within God, within God himself which we call the Trinity.

So that this sharing should be perfect, three are necessary neither more nor less. Neither less, because a love between two has something of the egoist, like a couple who refuse to procreate, to concretise their love in a third person. Not more than three, because it is not necessary and what is not necessary should be eliminated. The Trinitarian relationship is then the most perfect.

The Christian Arab philosophers, following the lead of Yahya Ibn'Adi (c. 940) adopted the Aristotelian vision of God as being the Intelligence which understands himself and is the object of intellection for himself. God is the Understanding-Intellect which is understood (*Aql-'Aqil-Ma'qul*). In effect, God is the greatest intellect; he is also the only one able to understand himself (and because of that he is the Understanding One, *al-'Aqil*; he is finally the sole object of knowledge for himself, he is the Understood One (*al-Maqul*). This formula applied for the first time to the Trinity by Yahy Ibn 'Adi around 940, was taken up by several later Christian Arab thinkers. It reminds one of the Trinitarian presentation of St. Augustine. God who is Love, loves himself and is the object of love for himself. This is their presentation of the Trinity.

IV. Incarnation and Redemption

1. The Incarnation presented to the Muslims

The incarnation is an internal necessity for God

- because if God is in his very essence, love
- and if love consists in self-communication, self giving
- in other terms if God is the Giver par excellence (*al-Gawwad*)
- he must necessarily (by a necessity internal to himself and not external) communicate himself, give himself.

We have seen that it is precisely within the Trinity that God gives and communicates himself. This is what the scholastic theologians called the *processio ad intra*. We have seen that God prolongs this gift by bringing into existence everything that exists, that is to say by creating. This is what is called the *processio ad extra*. But now that the world has been created, God crowns his gift by communicating himself (and not only by communicating life and existence to beings).

How is this understood? The explanation (one could say the 'reasoning') is simple.

- If God is the Giver par excellence (*al-Gawwad*), he must give what is best to the world. In Arabic, this is expressed in a beautiful formula: *Al-Gawwad yagud bi-agwad al-mawgudat*. For if he was not giving what is best to the world, he would no longer be the Giver, the Generous One (*al-Gawwad*). By the very fact that God gives as a gift to the world that which is best, he gives the best of that which exists.
- Now what could be better in the world than God himself?
- Therefore, if God is God, he has to give himself to the world. This is an internal necessity for God, a logical consequence, deriving from his essence which is the Giver par excellence (*Agathos or Gawwad*, to use

the philosophical terminology) it also derives from the fact that he is Love (to use the spiritual terminology).

Further, not only does God give himself to the world, but he gives himself to the noblest of his creatures to humanity. He gives himself to humanity his creation to be one with it. This union of God with humanity which he created is what we call the Incarnation (in Arabic *ta'annus*, that is to say "to become man" or again *taggassud* – "to become flesh" or again *ittiahd* or *ittisal* = union). The union of God with humanity which he created, the Incarnation, is a logical consequence of the essence of God manifested in the Trinity. It is the crowning achievement of the movement of communication *ad extra* begun in creation.

If the objection is made that it is not possible that God would communicate with humanity, one can reply: "Why is that not possible?"

- Is God not able to communicate himself? But then he would not be the All-Powerful One!
- Is it that he could communicate himself but does not want to do it? But then he is an egoist and not the God of love.
- Is it that the union between God and humanity (which is nothing less than the Incarnation) is impossible? But union is not impossible except between two opposites (*mutaddadan*). Now there can be no opposition between God and humanity: especially since according to the bible, God created humanity in his own image and likeness (Genesis 2:18), and the image can only be a reflection of the original. Therefore there can be no opposition between God and humanity.

Thus whatever way things are considered, if God is Love, he must become part of humanity.

2. The Redemption and the Eucharist presented to the Muslims

The same goes for the mystery of the Redemption. For us Christians this is almost too evident, for the text of St. John immediately comes to mind: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but may have life eternal" (John 3:16).

In the theogony of St. John, everything flows from the fact that God is Love. At the beginning of the Passion Narrative John recalls once again this mystery of love: "Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them until the end" (John 13:1) Then the narrative of the washing of the feet begins, a concrete sign of love, which in St. John replaces the Eucharistic narrative.

The Eucharist itself is nothing other than the continuation of the Incarnation. That is well explained by Bulus al-Busi, the Coptic theologian consecrated Bishop of Cairo in 1240. He shows how the Incarnation of God is continued in the Eucharist: first of all, God becomes incarnate to raise up humanity from its fall: secondly this same God incarnate makes himself bread so as to be the daily nourishment of humanity its strength and its life. In both instances it is out of love for humanity.

This movement of “descent” is admirably described by Saint Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God. But he lowered himself (or: emptied himself), to assume the condition of a slave and became as men are”. In the light of my explanation you could interpret in this way the words of Paul: God became much less than a man, an object in fact, because a slave is in Roman law an object. So, if Paul says that God took the condition of a slave it is not a metaphor. In effect, the fact of dying on a cross expresses it clearly: the cross in the Roman world is the punishment appropriate for slaves, a free man cannot be crucified.

In the same way by offering himself to humanity in the Eucharist, by becoming bread for the life of the world, Christ becomes a “thing” in the hand of everybody he gives himself to everyone to be eaten. From now on everybody can be united to God in a very simple way by receiving the Body of Christ in Communion.

It is possible to continue in this way and review all the sacraments and the entire faith and Christian practice in order to see how everything derives from the love of God: from this Trinitarian love as it is in itself, from this love given to humanity which is manifest in the life of Christ and the sacraments.

V. CONCLUSION

1. A simple, coherent and profound concept of God

In reality, as you can see, the Christian concept of God and of life is much simpler than that of Islam, at the same time it is much more profound and richer. The Trinity, far from being an inexplicable mystery making Christianity abstruse, is on the contrary the mystery which explains everything and in particular, gives meaning to our live.

Islam, in effect, is not as simple as it is made out to be and certainly not as rational. The Muslim profession of faith (the *sahadah*) affirms a double dogma: the dogma of a unique God and that of the prophecy of Muhammad. Now if you can understand even rationally the first dogma, namely, there is no other god but God, you do not understand (the second dogma) namely, why Muhammad should be his prophet, it's only because the Muslims say so. And, nothing in Muhammad's life

and even more so nothing in the explanations which the Muslims make allows one to rationally affirm the second dogma or even suggest that Muhammad might be a prophet.

On the other hand, the Christian profession of faith (our *sahadah*) is single and simple. It could be summarised in these few words: "I witness that God is love". And you could stop there. All the rest (including our Creed) is only the explanation of this profession of faith from which everything else is derived: the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the sacraments, notably the Eucharist, as we have seen, but also Baptism which integrates into the divine family into Christ and into the Church; the Sacrament of Penance, which re-integrates into the divine and Trinitarian communion; etc. If, and it is impossible, that some mystery of the Christian faith could not be linked to the love of God, to this love of the Triune God, then I would have reasons to doubt this point of faith.

So then, starting from the Trinity, that is to say from the God of Love, the Christian vision illuminates the whole Christian faith. In this sense, I can answer the challenge which the Muslims have thrown down when they assert that Christianity is complicated, irrational and incomprehensible. Another challenge will have to be accepted, to find out whether Christianity is realistic or unrealistic.....but we will deal with that in a second lecture.

Briefly, there is but one God, however our understandings and our representations of God are multiple and very different. This has been expressed in an admirable way by Abu Ra'itah Habib Ibn Hudayfah al-Takrit, who after having explained the unicity of God and having shown that this God is common to all believers, spoke to the Muslims (around the year 820) in this way "But what a distance there is between our concept of God and yours!"

This explains that at the same time we are brothers (and sisters) in faith in a God who is one (and here it has to be restated that the Muslims believe with conviction in this absolute unicity of God, indeed it is the very essence of Islam, the *tawhid*, and sometimes they express this conviction more clearly than the Christians), and also that we are quite far apart if we consider the understanding that each one has of this unique God.

2. The true dialogical attitude

There you have the paradox and the difficulty of dialogue: it affirms both of us. You meet these days two opposing tendencies in relation to Islam (and more generally to non-Christian religions) which consists in both cases of emphasising one aspect of reality.

The first insists on the fact that we all have a common faith in a unique God, that we are all sons of Abraham, that we are all in agreement on the essentials, and that the disagreements or differences concern the details only. It is a reaction of ignorance (at least we hope so, because if not it would be more serious: there would be a fixed desire to falsify reality) of perhaps ingenuousness, or naivete. It is evidence of kind feelings and a good heart. It is also evidence alas of a poorly developed mind.

The second tendency which is diametrically opposed, asserts that there is nothing in common between ourselves and the Muslims (or members of other religions). "Look at their concept of God", they say. Often they will compare the Christian ideal which is so noble with the Muslim practice which is hardly uplifting! This attitude is evidence of the same ignorance as the first tendency with the addition of fanaticism.

I am told from time to time that of two evils it's better to choose the lesser. Certainly on the personal level, this betokens an interior generosity which is absent from the other tendency; but it could also betoken psychological complexes which have not been resolved nor cured, or indeed a weakness of character, etc. Furthermore, at the level of community it is not certain that this tendency is always beneficial.

The third way, which I suggest, consists in holding on to these two affirmations simultaneously: we believe in the same God, but we understand this same God in ways which are profoundly different. From this derive profound divergences in the vision of human life, in the relationships between human beings, in the relationship between humanity and God, etc. That is what we are going to try and approach in our second lecture.

(KIERAN MAGOVERN, C.M., translator)

Is the Koran Revealed? Is Muhammad a Prophet? A Christian point of view

By Samir Khalil Samir, S.J.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Preliminary Remarks

1. A fundamental question.

Muslims ask us always about two sets of issues: those regarding Christianity (monotheism and Trinity, Incarnation and divinity of Christ, crucifixion of Christ) and those regarding Islam (is Muhammad a prophet? Is the Koran revealed?). This presentation concerns only the second set of questions, which is fundamental for them since it constitutes half their profession of faith (La Sahada). In other words, is Islam a Revealed Religion (din munzal, din samawi)? Is it a salvation path or can the Muslim be saved in spite of Islam?

2. The need to answer those questions.

It is not easy to answer those questions and, harder yet, to give the Muslims acceptable answers (I am not saying answers that please them). However, it seems to me that it is necessary to give answers without evading the problem even if it means trying to explain those answers to the Muslims later.

This effort is all the more necessary since the Catholic theology is in a gray area regarding this issue and a wide range of diverse and sometimes contradictory opinions are given and they are arousing astonishment and even scandal for many of the faithful. So this is a theological paper prepared by a Christian (an Arab living in a Muslim society) for Christians. The text being brief and the subject very delicate, the written form cannot reflect all subtleties but these will be tackled more thoroughly orally. I appeal to your kind attention.

3. Double imperative: Truth and Sympathy.

A long experience of dialogue with Muslims has convinced me that any ambiguity in speech or in thought is noxious. Moreover, I am convinced that, even although we can make concessions regarding the “living together”, we cannot make concessions with regard to dogma. Thus, an imperative of *absolute truth*: I refuse to

say only what the other is able to understand, I have to say also what the other doesn't like to hear, while striving to say it in the most acceptable way possible. At the same time, there is an imperative of *total sympathy* for what the Muslim lives and for what he believes in; learn to explore the beauty in him.

4. Particular situation of Islam.

Islam, the last major world religion is a monotheist religion and cannot be treated like Buddhism and Hinduism, which are not. It cannot be tackled like Judaism, which is our source and has an undeniably revealed yet incomplete Scripture. Moreover, Islam comes six centuries after Christianity, acknowledges in principle the two religions as revealed but pretends that it rectifies and completes them. So, Islam is theologically placed with respect to the Judo-Christian Revelation: Muhammad is the "Seal of prophecy" and the Koran is the Ultimate Testament given by God to humanity.

B. Some Theological Positions

5. Two classical positions.

Some (like, for instance, John Damascene, at the beginning of the 8th century), impressed by the resemblance to some Christian heresies, thought that Islam is but the latest of these heresies. Others saw in Islam the work of Satan, allowed by God because of the Christians' sins; Muhammad being thus one of the false prophets announced by the Christ.

6. Two new positions.

More recently, some, based on the opinions of some Fathers of the second and third centuries with respect to the Greek world (Justin, Clement of Alexandria or Irene) sought to see in Islam a preparation for the Gospel (the Seeds of the Word) and which, while being chronologically posterior to the Gospel, is logically anterior to it.

Others (Claude Geffré¹, Robert Caspar and the GRIC, Kenneth Cragg and W. Montgomery Watt) go even further: the Koran, according to them, is "a word of God" to man, different from our Scripture, or even a partial and incomplete revelation. Hebrew's text 1,1-2 on prophets which causes difficulty will be understood in a broad sense.

II. OVERVIEW OF ISLAM

¹ See, for example, Claude GEFFRE, *Le Coran, une parole da Dieu différente*, in: *Lumiere et Vie* 32 (1983), p. 28-29. Text in Dupuis, p. 226.

A. Muhammad and the Koran

7. Who is Muhammad?

Muhammad is convinced that he is the bearer of a message from God. More than that, he is convinced that he is the last prophet and the “seal of prophets” (*ḥaṭam al-nabiyyin*), he is the one with whom God’s revelation to mankind is achieved and reaches its perfection. He is also persuaded that Jesus has announced him and acknowledged him and that after him there will be (cannot be) no more prophets. To me, he seems like an outstanding social reformer and a politician of great talent. He is at the same time a man in love with God, whom he adores and to whom he prays; a sincere and convinced man who uses all means available in order to establish “God’s Kingdom on earth”, Islam. “He followed at many points the path of the prophets”, said the Catholicos Timothy I to Kaliph al-Mahdi in 781.

8. What is his message?

His message repeats the main themes of the Old Testament:

- a) Adoration of a unique God to whom we submit ourselves voluntarily and fully, without compromise with paganism, which should be eradicated by any possible means including war.
- b) A moral behavior based on the submission (often formal) to the revealed Law and on the respect of familial and tribal structures.
- c) A social behavior based on strict justice (*Lex Talionis* , *qasas*), compassion towards the weak and the mutual support within the *ummah*, which shall be protected even if that means the elimination of troublemakers (*hadd al-riddah*).

9. The Koran and the Bible.

This message is presented as inserted in the biblical lineage of prophets from Abraham to Jesus. It doesn’t pretend that it brings something new but it only wants to be a reminder of the revelation made by God to Adam since the creation of the world, a revelation which was distorted subsequently and of the innate religion in Man (Adam), Islam. However, the differences are notable between the two texts. The Muslim tradition has specified that Muhammad is not only a prophet (*Nabi*) but also a Messenger (*Rasul*), thus creating a revealed-Law, that abolished all those, which came before it.

10. With respect the Old Testament.

With regards to the Old Testament, it pretends that it corrects and completes it, recognizing among others that Jesus is the Messiah born of a virgin and attributes to him remarkable titles (such as Messiah, Word, Spirit,...), which however, do not have the same meaning as in the Gospel.

With respect to Christians, the Koran is shocked by their assertions, which are, from its perspective, contrary to the biblical message: Trinity, divinity of Christ, crucifixion of Christ, etc. It will then “rectify” them or deny them.

B. Problem: Ambiguity of Islam

11. The person of Muhammad.

On examining the person of Muhammad, we find an ambiguity in him: On the one hand, some noble features, attitudes and teachings which remind us of those of prophets of the Old Testament; on the other hand, some personal attitudes and positions not in the least in conformity with those of the prophets of the Old Testament and less to those of the apostles of Christ. For example, his passion driven attitude towards women (for instance, when he assumed some privileges in order to assuage his passion for Zayd’s wife, cf. Koran 33 : 36-38) and in the raids and wars or even his treachery with regard to some of his opponents (on all this, consult for example the Kindī Apology)

12. The Koran.

When we examine the Koran, we also find an ambiguity in it: on the one hand, some pages which remind us of the most beautiful pages of the Bible; on the other hand, some moral and dogmatic teachings which are contrary, even in contradiction with those of the New Testament. Moreover, the core conception of the Koran as “coming down” from heaven, as being divine literally makes the dialogue more difficult.

13. Muslims

When we examine the Muslims with whom we live, we notice the same ambiguity:

- a) On one hand, many reach an authentic experience with God, an attitude of adoration and of continuous submission to his will, an abandon of oneself to Him; at the same time, they reach a relation to their fellow men marked by justice and forgiveness, “wishing for his brother what he wishes for himself” in order to “imitate God’s qualities” (Hadīṭ); and all this through their faithfulness to the Koran and to the Prophet’s Sunnah and because of their meditation. The ritual prayer (Salat) five times a day and the invocations (du’a’) as well as fasting (sawm) and charity (Zakat and sadaqa) open their hearts to God.
- b) On the other hand, many others, also inspired by the same meditation of the Koran, consider that God is inaccessible and doesn’t seek to reveal himself

to man and that he is the “qahhar” who crushes and for whom we are slaves. The Christian idea of the divination of man, which is the core meaning of salvation, is outrageous for them. The cult can easily turn into formalism. The relation to others, on the basis of the Koran can easily turn to fanaticism and violence to defend “God’s rights”.

III. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

A. Preliminaries

14. A true malaise.

It is this ambiguity, this mixture of contrary even contradictory elements (concerning the person of Muhammad, the teaching of the Koran and Muslims’ attitude) which creates the problem. Because it is not a question of the ambiguity inherent to everything that is human, but of the ambiguity of what is supposedly coming from God (the Koran or the Prophet).

15. A very difficult dialogue.

This problem is growing (making the agreement between Christians and Muslims almost impossible) due to: (a) Muhammad proclaims himself the “seal of prophets” and the Tradition makes him the “Rasul” par excellence; (b) The Koran is presented as the ultimate revelation of God to mankind bringing with it the perfection of the knowledge of God; (c) Muslims consider themselves as the only authentic faithful (mu’minun), and all the others are not.

16. However, on these three points, Christians have almost the same discourse: John the Baptist is the last prophet, Christ is the ultimate Revelation of God to mankind and Christians are the authentic believers.

B. Can Muhammad be considered a prophet, in the Christian meaning of the word?

17. Muhammad, a sincere man of God.

For me, he is a sincere man who had had an authentic experience of God in his solitude in the Hira grotto. He comes out with a conviction of the absolute greatness of God the unique and of the necessity of revealing him. He inculcates in his followers the meaning of the absolute transcendence and of the infinite clemency of God to whom the creatures owe everything. This way, the faithful’ s heart can open up to God and to his spirit. “In this, he walked the prophets’ path,» said Timothy I. However, many have walked and still walk the prophets’ path. Thanks be to God!

18. Not a prophet.

Can we infer that he is a prophet sent by God to Arabs (or even to all peoples)? I don't think so. For, in the Christian perspective, a prophet is someone who not only receives a message from God for humanity, but also paves the way for Christ and for the message of the Gospel. Muhammad and the Koran, in many essential points, move away from the Christ and the Gospel and declares the latter superseded by the Koran.

19. A spiritual guide for many people.

If the word "prophet" means someone who, through his teaching and his life, helps men to live in justice and to give a central place in their life to God, then I would gladly say that Muhammad is a prophet in spite of the reservations that I have on some aspects of his teaching and of his life. But if that is the case, then many other people would deserve to be called prophets. However, saying this, I do not satisfy the Muslims for whom Muhammad is the prophet who recapitulates everything.

20. No "half prophet".

Cardinal Charles Journet², based on a text of Saint Thomas, recognizes that Muhammad could have benefited from a "partial prophetic light" shedding light on some truths (such as the monotheism of transcendent God) but not on others (which remained concealed or denied). I am a little bit reticent to admit this vision because it will make him a kind of "half prophet". Can God send a messenger who will announce a part of the Revelation and deny the other?

21. Sent by God? Or does God allow his action?

Finally, the most important question which I ask myself is the following: Was Muhammad chosen by God to be sent to the Arabs, and through them, to the whole world? I don't think so. In philosophy, we would say that he was an "instrumental cause", but not a "final cause". I would rather say, along with Louis Massignon, that "Muhammad is enlightened on some points but not on others"³. I would avoid using the word "prophet" too heavily loaded with ambiguity, to say that God has allowed him to announce to the Arabs something of the biblical Revelation, a task which fell upon Christians without doubt too negligent.

C. Islam is at the same time a road and an obstacle, but not a path of salvation

22. A way and an obstacle

² Cf. GRIC, *Ces Ecritures qui nous questionnent*, Paris: Centurion 1987, p. 111; c.r. de Jomier, p. 695.

³ Cited in GRIC, p. 111, note 18.

In brief, the Koran (like Muhammad's figure) is at the same time a way leading to God, leading men to a partial knowledge of God, and an obstacle towards the knowledge of God the Father revealed in Jesus Christ and of his son, Jesus, precisely because it pretends that it says the last word about God and Jesus Christ. Since the Koran doesn't lead man to discover the true face of Christ, it cannot be considered as revealed. Furthermore, from a sociological point of view, we can't find anything in it that cannot be deduced from the cultural environment of Arabia in the 7th century.

23. The Muslim can save himself, through Christ.

It goes without saying that this theological attitude does not mean at all the negation of salvation possible for any Muslim living sincerely his Muslim faith. This is what is asserted in the Vatican Council II, provided that this salvation happens in Christ and by him. Some would want Islam to be the road and the way to salvation for Muslims; I do not think that this can be asserted and not one pontifical or council document suggests it. This attitude does not mean the absence of dialogue and coexistence will be more authentic if they are less ambiguous.

IV. PASTORAL AND SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS

A. Delicacy and Authenticity

24. Delicacy

Can we transmit to a Muslim such point of view? Aren't we offending him? It goes without saying that I should use much delicacy, even sympathy and love. I must also recognize with joy everything that is beautiful and true in the Koran (like in any book and in any belief). Personally, I find that it is possible to say this in an acceptable manner. For three motives:

25. Respect

- a) First of all, my respect and my esteem for the other don't come from whether or not he is a believer, but from the fact that he is a human being and thus made in God's image. It is important to try to explain that to Muslims. His being a believer brings him nearer to me but does not necessarily increase my respect for him.

26. Fidelity to my faith.

- b) Second, if I acknowledge (in any way) that Muhammad is a prophet, then (whether I like it or not) I become a Muslim. In fact, the very core of the Islamic Šahādah is precisely this: to recognize that God is unique

and that Muhammad is a prophet.

27. Truth at all costs

- c) Finally, dialogue is based on the truth, which sets us free and not on complacent discourse. I have a duty towards myself to be coherent with my religion and I can't recognize Muhammad as the seal of prophets and the Koran as the Ultimate Testament.

Moreover, Muslims cannot recognize that Christ is the Verb of God, in the Christian meaning of the word, i.e. uncreated and pre-existent Verb, otherwise he would become a Christian or a hypocrite (*munāfiq*). Furthermore, I cannot put between parentheses my faith in Christ, who is the only one capable of saving mankind and the only one who reveals the Father.

B. Triple pastoral attitude: discernment, truth and love

28. Discernment:

For us, Christians, a triple pastoral attitude is requested. First of all, discernment:

- a) Discern in the Koran the part of light from the part of shadow, in the light of the evangelical Revelation of Jesus Christ.
- b) Help Christians make this discernment so as not to fall in an anti-Muslim fanaticism (frequent in the East) or in a pro-Muslim naivete (frequent in the West).
- c) Help Muslims (with an infinite discretion) decant their faith, in order to discover its partial, incomplete or erroneous parts; and finally to open up to the Gospel, which they think, they know through the Koran while they ignore it. Give rise to the desire for a more demanding spirituality and to know the Christ of the Gospel and not only the Christ of the Koran.

29. Truth.

After that there must be truth. Avoid any ambiguity. Be aware that some words, identical in the New Testament and the Koran (such as Word, Spirit, Messiah, Servant, Prophet, etc.) don't mean the same thing at all.

30. Love.

Finally and especially, love in Christ. God wants that all men be saved and

that they discover the Father. He entrusted us with that mission. How are we to live it? *Caritas Christi urget nos!*

Revelation and Inspiration in Christianity and Islam

By Emilio Platti, O.P.

1. Introduction

1.1. In order to study the question of revelation, or of inspiration in these two religions, I am obliged to start first of all with the religion based on a preexisting horizon which is the whole biblical tradition. I mean by this: Islam.

If the bible had been composed of several traditions, starting from Genesis, passing through the Hebrew law and the Prophets, the Psalms and the Books of Wisdom to get finally to the new testament -also composed of many traditions, Islam on the contrary is based on a single book, the Koran, that constitutes by itself a unique coherent written tradition framed during Mohammed's life and the twenty years after his death when the process of compilation of all the verses was completed under the caliph Uthman. This is at least according to the Muslim tradition; something we will not put in doubt here because we do not have to raise this issue now.

1.2. Therefore, it is easier to identify in the first place the spirit in which the Koran was conceived rather than to analyze the different biblical traditions. Nevertheless, later on we will have to study them more attentively, in particular, at the New Testament tradition.

1.3. For, when we read the Koran, one thing attracts our attention, we cannot understand it without knowing certain important components of the biblical tradition. Yet, not all of them, since there are essential elements of the Christian Bible which the Koran entirely ignores. On the other hand, the Koran largely exceeds the written Bible by getting inspired from non canonical biblical traditions even so that scholars have enormous difficulties in finding the origins. It is evident that the Koran draws widely from preexistent Christian and Jewish sources like the Bible, the Talmud and the Midrash, the apocrypha of the old and New Testament, Jewish and Christian legends as well.

1.4. We don't have to search here for these sources of the Koran. By mentioning some of them we are rather going to detect what the Koran wants to do with this "biblical material" it adopts. What is the fundamental message it seeks to transmit? It is here, in fact, where we may possibly find what can be called "revelation" in Islam.

1.5. Many of you know in one way or other the history of the Koran and Mohammed's proclamation. Yet, I will concentrate on this for a while, since it is the

essential point of my talk.

2. The context in which the Koran appeared

2.1. We all know that Mohammed was born in Mecca, in a polytheistic environment. The Muslim sources describe the Ka'ba, a religious center managed by the Kuraysh tribe, the surroundings of the Ka'ba, the columns representing an important number of divinities present at that time, various holy places of the region related to this center, the sacrifices that take place, pilgrimages which gathered numbers of tribes from the west of Arabia, the three astral divinities worshipped by polytheist Arabs: al-Lât, Mnât, and al-'Uzza mentioned in the Koran to challenge them in Chapter 53. It is obviously the furthest region of the Middle East where the ancient Semitic polytheistic religion survived. We find several common elements of this religion with the Hebrew's neighbors in the Bible. So, it is a survival of a thousand years' history.

2.2. It is a survival, because during the sixth century after Jesus Christ, the Middle East was christianized. Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia were Christian as well as Syria and a large part of Mesopotamia. Palestine of the sixth century was Christian. If Judaism was only sporadically present in Palestine among others in Tiberias, many tribes settled in Arabia fleeing probably from the Roman repression after the defeat of the last resistance in 135. We could find them also in Yathrib, that became later on Medina, Madinat-an-Nabi, the city of the prophet. There were even Jews in Yemen together with Christians. Some of them were known: they are the Christians of Najran.

2.3. All this is very well known. But, the kind of presence Christians and Jews had in Arabia is less clear: they are above all the bearers of oral biblical traditions, and as for the Christians, they were also impregnated with heterodoxy if not ignorant of the essential elements of Christianity. When Father Heshaymeh analyzed the preislamic Arabic poetry studied by Father Sheikho, he concluded that certain poets were Christians however, they didn't know or knew very little about the essential Christian message: Incarnation, Trinity, Redemption,...

2.4. Another essential point: the social and economic context of Mecca. We know that the Quraysh tribe managed to monopolize the caravan trade that related Yemen –and thus, Africa- to Mesopotamia and the rest of the Middle East. The departure of these caravans was certainly a very important event because it is evoked in chapter 106: the people of kuraysh get along very well when “the caravan of winter and summer ”is in question because these caravans brought wealth and power. A wealth and power that will be criticized by the Koran for the self-sufficiency that derives from it. Moreover, they know that they are protected by the lord of the Ka'ba, their supreme god.

3. The fundamental message of the Koran

3.1. Here we have two elements joined together in this chapter 106 which goes back to the early beginning of Mohammed's recitation: the caravans (verse 2) and the call to worship the lord of the holy temple "RABB AL BAYT"(verse 3). We can say that Mohammed was writing his message entirely within the context of Mecca where he was born and grew up.

3.2. Yet, it is nothing of the sort. And this is the real fundamental issue. Let's read together some of the oldest verses of the Koran recited at the beginning of the recitation by Mohammed.

Chapter 93, 9-11:

- 10 Therefore, as for the orphan, do not oppress (him).
- 11 And as for him who asks, do not chide (him).
- 12 And as for the favor of your Lord, do announce (it).

Chapter 96,6-8:

- 6 Nay! Man is most surely inordinate.
- 7 Because he sees himself free frok want.
- 8 Surely to your Lord is the return.

Chapter 102,1-8:

- 1 Abundance diverts you.
- 2 Until you come to the graves.
- 3 Nay! You shall soon know.
- 4 Nay! Nay! You shall soon know.
- 5 Nay! If you had known with a certain knowledge.
- 6 You should most certainly have seen the hell.
- 7 Than you shall most certainly see it with eye of certainty.
- 8 Then on that day you shall most certainly be questioned about the boons.

Chapter 104,1-9:

- 1 Woe to every slanderer, defamer.
- 2 Who amasses wealth and considers it a provision (against mishap).
- 3 He thinks that his wealth will make him mortal.
- 4 Nay! He shall most certainly be hurled into the crushing disaster.
- 6 It is the fire kindled by Allah.
- 7 Which rises above the hearts.
- 8 Surely it shall be closed over upon them.
- 9 In extended columns.

Chapter 107,1-3:

- 1 Have you considered him who calls the judgment a lie?
- 2 That is the one who treats the orphan with harshness.

3 And does not urge (others) to feed the poor.

3.3. I have at length enumerated these verses, since they reveal the initial message of the Koran. An outline of a basic message appears from the start taking shape in the early recitations and leading very rapidly on to a double theme:

The rejection of sufficiency as well as self-satisfaction, and the assertion of the ethical responsibility; mankind is interpellated because he will be judged upon his acts.

“Then as for him who gives away and guards (against evil),
And accepts the best,
We will facilitate for him the easy end.
And as for him who is niggardly and considers himself free from need (of Allah),
And rejects the best,
We will facilitate for him the difficult end.
And his wealth will not avail him when he perishes”.
(Koran 92:5-11).

The image of the judgment day, which expresses this theme, is very close to the prophetic biblical eschatology. We encounter hell, a devouring fire (167 times in the Koran) The Hebrew nomination of this hell “Djahannam” 77 times in 39 chapters... the term “djanna”, gardens of paradises, 70 times!

3.4. The conclusion I deduce from this short analysis of the early times of the Koran is the following: in the social, economical and religious context of Mecca a prophetic message with biblical characteristics is suddenly proclaimed by a Mecca citizen who was always well integrated in the Mecca community. All the Meccan people were astounded.

3.5. Defining the initial kerygma which the Islamic message has, doesn't seem so difficult to me. It is present in this refusal of self-sufficiency shown by the Meccan citizens at the time of Mohammed. It is the mirror of their refusal of the recitation of the Koran, which has an exceptional expression in the rhythm and the vision - that fascinates them -, we distinguish best what constitutes Mohammed's initial flash of revelation. We distinguish this light that enlightens, with a new spirit, the ignorance of the Meccan. Satisfied with themselves and with their success in trade, they prefer the comfort of their affluence to the values of solidarity and transcendence to which the prophet calls them. Three themes are bound together; they constitute a turning point that separates a world at his end, the last vestiges of a certain Semitic polytheism, from a new humanism: 1-justice and solidarity; 2-judgment in the hereafter; 3-the only Lord, master of all the world and all the livings: RAbb Al-âlamîn. Faith in God, justice and solidarity come together and are in the core of the religion.

3.6. So, it seems to me, that if we analyze the Koran theme of the Meccan chapters, an important eschatology appears clearly, associated with the assertion of God the sole creator: It is the requirement of justice and solidarity in the light of judgment, primordial theme of the Koran which leads the listener to ethic interrogation. Yet, this message has a fundamental biblical character and is not related in any way to the ancient religion of the Meccan.

3.7. from this message the Koran says that it has a divine origin. It is revealed abruptly:

Chapter 39:1 and 40:2:

“The revelation of the Book is from Allah, the Mighty (the Wise), [the Knowing]”.

Chapter 41:2

“A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful God”.

We note in passing that we know through inscriptions from Yemen that the Christians and the Jews of this region used to call God by the name of Rahmân whereas the Meccan knew only Allah, the supreme god and the lord of the Ka’ba. Yet, the Koran identifies this supreme god and lord of the Ka’ba to God the creator, judge and merciful which is the God of the Bible .

4. Explicitness of the message

4.1. This message assembles three essential elements of the biblical message in which the Meccan didn’t believe or didn’t know - here we have an essential point in our presentation - (1) the eschatology: the last judgment and the payment in the future life, hell and paradise, (2) the strict monotheism, that gathers in one God the important attributes: being creator and merciful judge (3) the prophecy whereas the Meccans only know soothsayers - and their oracles - as well as poets. Prophecy isn’t in the first place the same as it is in the Old Testament with Amos and the majority of the prophets, knowledge of the future, but a rude warning and an ethical requirement.

4.2. This message of the Koran will be made explicit - first it will take the form of commandments, as we know in the Bible. Then, when Mohammed has to take refuge in Yathrib, Medina, and becomes the head of the city, the commandments will be detailed into concrete prescriptions concerning the rituals, the family, the society, the holy war and other aspects.

4.3. As for the fundamental commandments, we encounter them again in two chapters 17 and 5 (in brief). So, we won’t be surprised to find in the Koran a list of

fundamental precepts that guide human behavior, these precepts are on the whole analogue to the ten commandments of the Bible expressed in the book of Exodus (20: 1-7); imposing commandments with the risk of eroding what constitutes the human itself. These rules of conduct are found in the middle of a Meccan Surat, 17:22-39, (al-Isrâ'; the Night Journey) as well as in chapter (6, 151-156) where Moses is mentioned.¹

Among others, we come upon this beautiful expression of verses 23-24 related to parents who become old:

“And to be good to parents, whether one or both of them attains old age with thee; say not To them: “Fie” neither chide them, but speak unto them words respectful, and lower to them the wing of humbleness out of mercy and say, “My lord, have mercy upon them, as They raised me up when I was little”.

Other prescriptions command

- to be good with your kinsman, the poor, and the passenger.
- not to kill children in fear of poverty.
- to avoid adultery.
- Not to “kill except by night, the life which Allah made sacred”.
- not to seize the property of the orphan.
- to hold to one’s commitments, to be just, not greedy...
- not to “trample the earth with pride” or insolence...
- “That is the wisdom the Lord has revealed to you”!

4.4. All this is framed within the first commandment of not placing any other god next to God (verses 22-23 and 39) as is the case in the Bible (Exodus 20,

¹ 6,151: Say: Come, I will recite what your Lord has forbidden you: that you associate not anything with him, and to be good with your parents, and not to slay your children because of poverty; we will provide you and them; and that you approach not any indecency outward or inward, and that you slay not the soul God has forbidden, except by right. That then he has charged you with; perhaps you will understand.

6,152: And that you approach not the property of the orphan, save in the fairer manner, until he is of age. And fill up the measure and the balance with justice. We charge not any soul save to its capacity. And when you speak, be just, even if it should be to a near kinsman. and fulfill God’s covenant. that then he has charged you with; perhaps you will remember

6,153: And that this is my path, straight; so do you follow it, and follow not divers paths lest they scatter you from his path. that then he has charged you with; perhaps you will remember.

6,154: Then we gave Moses the book, complete for him who does good, and distinguishing every thing, and as guidance and a mercy; perhaps they would believe in the encounter with their lord. (on the judgment day)

6,155: This is a book (the Koran) we have sent down, blessed; so follow it, and be God fearing; perhaps so you will find mercy;

6,156: Lest you should say, “the Book was sent down only upon two parties before us, and we have indeed been heedless of their study”.

3:”You shall not have other gods besides me”): human beings are not fundamentally divided, each one having his god, every tribe or every nation their own divinities, expelling those of others, adoring whatever they like. The unity of God creates the unity of humanity. This is how these rules of conduct apply to everybody. One cannot deny this fundamental Law with impunity.

4.5. It appears immediately that this fundamental Law, does not proceed from the human being’s freedom. This orphan mentioned by the Koran, the Bible and the Gospel, these parents weakened by age, this poor person, this traveler seeking hospitality evoked in the Koran, the injured person helped by the good Samaritan in the Gospel, cannot – by their very weakness – compel anyone to exercise their rights! The proof relies in the fact that we can easily pay no heed.

Now, it is this precise weakness that opens to us a new dimension of the human being revealed in the Bible, the Gospel and to a lesser extent in the Koran. For the Gospel goes very far on this path, much farther than the Koran, namely to the death of Jesus on the cross. Man can continue his own path by only looking after his affairs but then he passes along side of what apparently constitutes an essential dimension of humanity. While man is used to exercising his autonomy, to taking care of the world he controls, to developing his own activity and thus to striving at the flowering of his personality, to freeing himself, he is confronted by otherness which challenges him, which imposes itself on his freedom and which does not proceed from his liberty.

The precepts evoked do not depend upon his arbitrary will: They are heteronomous. Religions declare that they are divine commandments. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam meet thus in an essential way. These obligations disclose a human dimension that completes - but in an essential way - the dimension of autonomy cherished in particular by the west, the conquest of the world, the continuous surpassing of the limits of our knowledge and capacity, the limits of our own progress and the development of the world which we make our own.

The respect for the other and his property, welcoming him, hospitality, trust, generosity, gratitude, the acceptance of a gift, forgiveness, mercy and especially, compassion (ar-Rahma) all which the fundamental commandments imply and the virtues religion puts forward, belong to a completely different order than that of autonomy, domination and struggle for the rights. For the religious person, human rights are thus based not on the application of a coercible force that obliges the other to recognize my rights and those of my group, but they are based on the respect of the rights the other which at times, in his weakness, he cannot impose on me.

4.5. Two things are important in these texts:

1. The Koran considers itself to be a perfect continuity of the Torah and the Gospel, both of which it considers as “coming down from God”.

2. The commandments are heteronomous: they come from God, people cannot extricate themselves in a movement of self-sufficiency.

5. Commandments and prescriptions of the Koran: which statute?

5.1. The message of the law is essential in the Koran. I personally think that Muslim scholars of the revival perceived it clearly.

They are right to assert that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a vision of God's Shari'a. As much as it is a matter of ethical questioning, it is this aspect of the Koran which seems authentic to me. But, we must emphasize one more time that, firstly, the Koranic recitation took place in opposition to the Meccan, and that, it uses biblical material. This Koranic material is mainly non-canonical; i.e. to make the idea explicit, it derives from the large oral tradition of Jewish and Christian elements. Was Mohammed aware of what he was doing? I do not know: We only know that the Koran talks about "revelation" of God's Book. It also says that it is a repetition of the previous messages: it is obviously the case. But only in some extent: as much as it is about fundamental commandments and heteronomous ethical questioning. The Koran drops all the rest.

5.2. One of the big problems of the contemporary Muslims is positioning themselves in relation to the fundamental commandments and the prescriptions of the Koran to which is added "As-Sunna", Mohammed's way of life. We know in addition that Muslim dogma considers Mohammed's way of life perfect, as much as it considers the Koran as an inimitable divine word. It emerges from these two dogmas that Muslim orthodoxy considers the Koran and the Sunna, fundamental commandments, Koranic prescriptions and rules of life on the same level. They are at all times universally valid. The Koran and the Sunna thus became the pillars of the political Islam: a structure of a universal society. The one and only that suits God. Yet, it is obvious that the Koranic prescriptions of Medina and the prophet's manner of life are tied to Mohammed's historical conditions. Some modern and liberal Muslims separate, from that time, the fundamental principals of divine calls and their concretizations connected to time and circumstances; even if Koranic prescriptions are in question.

5.3. We touch here the reasons of contemporary fundamentalism: by not taking into consideration the historical circumstances of the prophetic way of life, this movement wants to impose them on everybody as being the only possible human culture in disregard of the diversity of human cultures due to the different human contexts. It also wants to impose the universality in time although we all know, more than ever before, that time changes. From that moment, on the political Islam has become a dangerous totalitarianism of which we have experienced misdemeanors crimes and atrocities. Starting from the incorrect idea that Koran prescriptions and Sunna are the expression of God's will for all times and all places

the Islamist militants want to impose all the details of Mohammed's way of life in Medina; which is absurd. I am not saying the same about the fundamental commandments that are found in the three monotheist religions.

5.4. I also leave aside the question of whether Mohammed's conduct was really so perfect as Muslim dogma says. I very much doubt it! And this is one of the major obstacles that encounter the Islamo-Christian dialogue. Anyway, the Second Vatican Council doesn't mention it while enumerating the rapprochement between Islam and Christianity.

6. Relation of Islam with the two other Religions; Judaism and Christianity

6.1. Judaism

6.1.1. Those who know how many times the Koran mentions the Bible patriarchs, as often as it refers to Mary and Jesus. These "stories of the prophets" - *Qisas al Anbiyâ* - or rather these allusions to the stories of biblical characters which the Koran calls "the prophets", form more than half of the Koran. One thing strikes us: these allusions to these stories do not repeat biblical history except for the story of Joseph in Egypt, which is a structured one, but seems to be built around Joseph's profession of faith in prison in chapter 12:38-40:

"12,38". And I follow the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim and Ishaq and Yaqoub; it beseems us not that we should associate aught with Allah; this is by Allah's grace upon us and on mankind, but most people do not give thanks.

"12,39": O my two mates of the prison! Are sundry lords better or Allah the One, the Supreme?

"12,40". You do not serve besides Him but names which you have named, you and your fathers; Allah has not sent down any authority for them; judgement is only Allah's; He has commanded that you shall not serve aught but Him; this is the right religion but most people do not know.

As I understand the Koran, it doesn't linger on the story itself of the people of Israel and its patriarchs but makes allusion to these characters just to find in their words and their acts the elements of the initial Koranic message: the demand for justice and solidarity, demand for obedience to God's law, in the light of the judgement of the one and only God.

Even if other elements of the prophets' stories appear, the Koran cuts them down; they have no importance at all. It is the eschatological and monotheistic message that prevails.

6.1.2. The Koran collects, in a way, the fruits of the Jews' history, and

affirms the only law of God without mentioning, as the Bible does, the long march of the people who discover little by little their relation to Yahwe, their own sins, and lots of privileged moments when God reveals himself to his people. The Koran does not have this diversity in its revelation: God is already present with all his attributes. He does not reveal himself in the history: he appears abruptly with all the requirements of his law. Anyway, he does not reveal himself: he only reveals his unchanging decree, his law, his future judgment and the reward which ensues from it. God remains mystery. Therefore the Koran knows neither evolution nor history. Human history only has unimportant events: everything is tied to obedience of the law already known by Adam and his descendants:

“7,172” - And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls: “Am I not your lord ?” they said, “Yes! We bear witness”. Lest you should say on the day of resurrection: “Surely we were heedless of this”.

6.1.3. The Koran will take little by little a position of refusal toward the Old Testament and the Jewish history. The complete rupture between Mohammed and Judaism will take place in Medina. Thus in Koran 2,87:

”And most certainly, we gave to Musa the Book and we sent apostle after him one after another... Whenever then an apostle came to you with that which that which your souls did not desire, you were insolent so you called some liars and some you slew”.

These references of Moses’ story are not what is the most surprising in these texts but the radical criticism of Jews. The discussion that has started with the Jews in Mecca takes in Medina such dimensions that one can speak about a radical rupture between them and the Muslims, particularly in verses 153 to 161 of chapter 4. We cannot disregard the military situation in Medina either which finally led the three Jewish tribes to disappear by being exiled or by physical elimination.

6.1.4. By becoming autonomous in Medina, with its own rites and prescriptions, Islam refused to find the manifestation of a relation with God in the Bible and in the history of the Jews. The Koran will proclaim that the Torah was corrupted and that only the Koran is the revelation of God.

At the same time, the whole richness of the Bible is put aside with all its contents, which the Koran never took back. The simplicity of the Koranic message will object to the biblical image of Job, David’s sin, God’s implication in history...

6.1.5. It will only retain the requirement of God’s law that arises abruptly before every human being. I understand the abrupt coming down of the Koran in this way. However, Mohammed and even the Koran with all the Muslim traditions understand this coming down of the Koran as if each word, each verse, each

Koranic expression, each used term, each detailed precept, comes directly from God with no human or historical mediation.

6.2. *Christianity and the Koran.*

6.2.1. What happens in the relation between the Koran and Christianity is more grave, since in Christianity this mediation, this incarnation of God's Word in history has a name: Jesus-Christ.

While the Koran asserts the holiness of Jesus and his mother, the Virgin Mary, it doesn't touch in any way the story of Jesus as in the Gospel. Here too, the story isn't important at all, even though the Koran presents what we may call "an apocryphal gospel of Jesus' childhood". This is how we can consider the elements of chapter 19 and chapter 3 that concerns rather Mary than Jesus.

As for the adulthood of Jesus, the parables, the sermon on the mount, his special relation with people he encountered, his conflicts with the Pharisees, his suffering, and especially his death on the cross - for the salvation of all - the meaning of this death, there is not even a word or too little in order that Jesus' life and death take on all the meaning that the first witnesses perceived in it.

6.2.2. In fact, the image of Jesus in the Koran agrees perfectly with the conception of the identity of God's law throughout the ages as well as the divine message, which is always identical. So, the message of Jesus is nothing else but a new version of the eternal book. Jesus transmits the book that is, once more, coming from God. Notice as well that the Koran talks about the Gospel in the singular without mentioning any other texts of the New Testament, apart from the four gospels whether it is the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Paul's letters, or the Revelation. The Koran presents Jesus in its own way and this presentation is perfectly in accordance with the mission of Muhammad and other prophets. Consequently, the Christians of the Koran become authentic believers only in as much as they are islamized Christians and accept exclusively the Koran Kerygma. The central role of Jesus as a mediator of the revelation that the four gospels present, thus was not integrated by the Koran, nor was the dogmatic expression of his divine filiation. This formula of divine filiation is much too suggestive of the old polytheistn representation. Therefore, the Koran rejects it. It is almost natural that this criticism already appears in the Meccan Chapters of the second period, particularly in Chapter *Maryam*. And it is this apparent incompatibility of the Christian dogmatic expressions with the strict monotheism of the message that led the Koran to the idea of a "falsification of the original message of the Gospel".

6.2.3. Moreover, one of the most characteristic features of the Koranic Christianity is the complete absence of Paul's interpretation of Jesus: the one which frees man from the burden of the old law. On the contrary, the whole late Muslim tradition accuses Saint Paul of devising a reinterpretation of the Gospel, thus

distorting the original meaning of Jesus' message taking away from it the fundamental aspect of God's law the "Sharī'a". Only in one place, chapter 3, verse 50, does the Koran allow to filter in a certain distancing of Jesus with regard to the old Law: "... and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you".

6.2.4. The most revealing sign of the Islamic position toward Christianity is the categorical refusal of the cross; a significant element for Christians. In fact, this refusal displays a crucial point; i.e. what is highly significant for Christians in the life of Jesus is not pertinent for Islam. Now that the Muslim version of Jesus' life is radically different, we should search for the mediation and the source of faith in Islam somewhere else: we find it in the ethic interpellation of the recitation as we have said.

6.2.5. As a result, we certainly cannot assert that the Koran is Christian: the interpretation it gives of Jesus in his relation with God and the Law no longer resemble any of the New Testament versions of the person of Jesus. That Jesus' death on the cross be put aside as insignificant, indicates to us that the "memoria Christi", that Christians considered essential, has no real meaning for Islam. Therefore, the Koran does not have a Christology in the Christian sense of the word, since it does not present any element which would permit bringing to light in the person of Jesus Christ that which makes him (for Christians) a mediator of salvation. While the content of the Koran is fundamentally biblical, as we have said, it does not include the redemptive mediation of Christ, because the Koran sees itself as the only mediation of salvation.

Every temptation to match Christianity and Islam on this point is doomed to failure, considering the role attributed in Christianity to the life, actions, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, under the sign of his relation to the Father.

Islam possesses its own religious doctrine and sensibility especially since the recitation in Medina even if some "Christian elements" in relation to Jesus are integrated.

7. Jesus, the epiphany of God

7.1. Let us read the words of Jesus:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not a dot, will pass from the law..."(Mt .5,17-19).

It seems to me, in the light of what Jesus has said and done and what his disciples have practiced after Pentecost, that we must effectively conclude that

Jesus didn't want to abolish the fundamental commandments and especially not the divine interpellation they express. God's law remains acquired knowledge. The demands, on the contrary, are greater. For he has shown by his person the will to save all humankind emanating from God. The believer is invited to share this will of salvation, which is not an easy task and demands a certain renunciation.

7.2. By going beyond what was revealed of God in the history of Israel, Jesus manifested what was still veiled of God. Consequently, he allowed us not to stick no longer to the letter of the law, but to its spirit. As the Christmas liturgy expresses it using the words of Saint Paul in Titus "but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our savior appeared" (3,4) "for the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all" (2,11).

It is the manifestation of this God that the prophets of the Old Testament like Isaiah have announced.

7.3. Yet it happened that this truth of God, which appeared in Jesus, wasn't accepted by everybody: on the contrary, the Pharisees and doctor of the law vehemently opposed him, up to demanding his torture and death. Being staunch to the truth of God he incarnated, Jesus did not deny him even in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and to the cross.

And starting from the Easter morning it was clear that God also did not disavow him. Jesus is raised from the dead in glory. Christians can therefore follow his path and live in his spirit that remains with them.

7.4. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ takes place then in the manner of the epiphany, the manifestation in the human person of Jesus. The evangelists tried, each in his own way, to describe the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus in a way that shows effectively this epiphany to the reader or listener. No divine and eternal word came down on them: with their own words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, they told us about Jesus. He, who is the Good News.

Later on, the councils tried to express this reality: Jesus, Son of God, divine and human; God; creator and judge, Jesus, his saving Word among us, the Spirit of God present in the community of believers, in which we see the action of this Spirit; Jesus, our savior.

8.1. Unfortunately, the Koran knows nothing about this. Neither does it refer to the prophets who foresaw and prophesied those things that Jesus would fully reveal. It doesn't mention this. It lingers upon words which it rejects, without knowing their meaning, afraid of facing a certain polytheism in Christianity; a polytheism it has vehemently struggled against. "It is not convenient for Allah ("ar-Rahmân") to have a son".

A phrase that is repeated 13 times in the Koran and is confirmed in this sole verse of Medina: "the Christians say: "The Messiah is the son of Allah" (9:30).

8.2. Not having understood the gospel message, Muslims can undergo the possible drift of the Pharisee and of attachment to the letter of the Law, of the Koran and of the Sunna. This is, unfortunately, once again, the case at the end of this century with the Islamic militant movements.

There is nevertheless in the Koran an echo of the gospel message that Louis Massignon has perceived through his religious experience and has translated in many of his works. This echo is the compassion, the transcendence of oneself for others; it is sharing the suffering or the joy felt by a fellow human. A compassion that welcomes others, hospitality: the rahma, the essential attribute of God, ar-Rahmân, the most important name of God which we find in each chapter, and that came-according to the Meccan -from elsewhere.

The theological foundations of the interfaith dialogue

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In the world nowadays, the religious plurality has become a fact. There is not one religion, but many religions. Communication and interdependence among various peoples and cultures have developed a greater consciousness of religious diversity, with the advantages and risks that this brings. Despite the crisis, religiosity has not disappeared. The Church asks all Christians to take a step towards the believers through the interfaith dialogue. This step could be realized on the every day life scale, through promoting common social projects among the believers of the different religions ,through the doctrinal speech and sharing religious experiences.

But what are the underlying theological reasons that the Catholic Church considers the interfaith dialogue as a part of its evangelist mission? The search for theological reasons is a necessary condition for a fruitful dialogue. The question can be put this way: How does the Church judge these religions from the theological point of view? ¹ What value does it give to religions? Are these religions a means of salvation for their followers? The relationship of Christians with other religions and the dialogue that results from it will depend on the answer to these questions. (*Document of the International Theological Commission, Christianity and Other Religions, CR.3*).

We have to consider at first the unity of all human beings in the creative and saving will of God. The redeeming will of God has been manifested in Jesus Christ. The Christ himself has given the Church a universal mandate. And the Church accomplishes this mission in a pluralistic world regarding the religions. That is what drives us to ask questions on the saving role of other religions.

1. One God, Creator and Saviour

There is only one God and he is the creator of all human beings ,whether they are Christians or Jews or Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists or coming from a tribal religion or any other religion. All are created in the image and likeness of God. This

¹ The principal theological positions regarding this question are Church-centeredness, Christ-centeredness and Theo-centrism. The Church-centeredness position denies the possibility of salvation for those who do not belong openly to the church, basing themselves on a certain theological system and on the erroneous understanding of the phrase "outside the Church , there is no salvation." The Christ-centeredness position accepts that, inside the other religions, there could be salvation, but these could not have salvific autonomy, due to the uniqueness and universality of salvation of Jesus Christ. (CR. 11). This is the most common position of Catholic theologians. Theo-centricism claims to be a development of Christ-centeredness, a change of perspective. It tries to recognise the riches of other religions and the testimony of their adherents, and, in the last analysis , wishes to facilitate the union among religions with the view of a common action in favour of world peace (CR.12).

means a capacity for a personal relationship with God, and, by the same token, a capacity for making a covenant (covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, New Covenant)².

In every human being, the nature is the same. God has gifted everyone of us with a body and a soul, an intelligence and a will, with feelings and aspirations and particularly a thirst for happiness that cannot be completely quenched. God has instilled in every person an insatiable desire for eternal happiness that in the end cannot be completed but in Him, in the face to face contemplation of what He is, in the beatitude of the eternal life. St Augustan, after the ramblings of his youth, finally said: "You have created us for yourself and our heart lives in anguish until it rests in You". God, who for the same reason has created men and women at His image and resemblance wanted for every one the same end. The 2nd Vatican Council declared that God, who created and preserved everything by His word, presents for the whole world to see, a permanent testimony of himself. Without stopping, He showed His solicitude for all humans, to give eternal life for all those who seek salvation (Dei Verbum, 3).

During the universal days of prayer for the peace in Assisi in 1986, Pope John Paul II has synthesized these fundamental realities, that concern all human beings in the divine plan of creation and the final destiny of men. That is why there is only one divine testimony for every human beings in this world (Jn 1:9) one principle and one end, no matter the color of the skin, the historical horizon where he lives and acts, the culture where he has grown up and that he speaks. The differences are a minor element compared to the unity that is on the contrary, radical, determining, and fundamental³.

Thus we can understand why St Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy that God wants all men to be saved and reach the truth, because God is unique as well as the mediator between God and humans, Jesus Christ who became a man himself, and who has sacrificed himself for our sake (1 Tm 2: 4-6) These words lead us into the second point of our reflection. One Saviour and, therefore, one salvation, one and identical for all people: a full configuration with Jesus and communion with him in the sharing of divine filiation.

2. Jesus Christ⁴, the universal saviour⁵.

The divine and redeeming will, unique and final, meant for all humans, has Jesus Christ in its centre. God has so much loved the world, that He has given His only

² The New Covenant is that of the Spirit, a new and universal covenant, an alliance of the universality of the Spirit (CR. 52)

³ Talk to the Cardinals and the Roman Curie on the 22 December 1986 Assisi: The world Day of Prayer for Peace, Pontifical Council, Justice and Peace 1987 p.149)

⁴ In the name of Christ is understood the one who anoints, the Father, the one who is anointed, the Son, and the anointing, which is the Holy Spirit (St. Irenaeus) (CR. 54) "The whole Christ", these are the Christians anointed with the Spirit and the Church. The whole Christ includes in some way every person, because Christ is united to all people (GS 22) (CR. 55)

⁵ "Universal": *versus unum*, toward one.

son so that all who believe in Him, would never be lost and gain the eternal life. (Jn 3: 16) Because of His love for us, and for our salvation, He descended from Heaven (Credo)

The 2nd Vatican Council teaches us that the son of God, by His incarnation⁶, has been united in a certain way, to every human being. (GS. 22; Redemptoris Missio, RM. 6 and others). The idea is often repeatedly found in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, who got their inspiration from some texts of the New Testament, for example the parable of the lost sheep. (Cf. Mt. 18:12-24; Lk. 15:1-7); this is identified with the lost human race which Jesus came to search (CR. 46). Assuming human nature, the Son of God has carried on his shoulders the whole of humankind to present it to the Father. (CR. 46). The grace of God acts invisibly in man. Given that Christ has died for us, and that the last vocation of man is unique even divine, we have to know that the Holy Spirit offers us, in ways that only God knows, the possibility to be associated to the Paschal mystery. (Gaudium et Spes, 22) that means the participation to the mystery of the sufferings, the death and the resurrection of Christ. It will be more difficult to determine how people who do not know Jesus Christ and how these religions enter in relationship with him, but it is necessary to refer to the mysterious ways of the Spirit, which gives to all the possibility of being associated to the paschal mystery (GS. 22) and whose action cannot be but referred to Christ (RM. 29). The question of the salvific value of the religions as such can be considered in the context of the universal action of Christ (CR.49).

That means that we find only in Jesus Christ the path, the truth and the life. (cf Jn 14: 6) our complete religious being⁷. Only in Christ God reconciled in him everything (2 Cor 5: 18-19). Only in Christ, can we find the answer to the enigma of hurt and death (GS. 22) to the fundamental questions on the origins of man, his life on earth, and his life after death. St Peter and St John declared courageously before the Jewish Supreme Council, after they have been arrested, that Jesus Christ is the universal savior, because there is no other name given to men, and through which we will be saved. (Ac 4: 12) Jesus died for all of us, and He really is, as the Samaritans say, the savior of the world (Jn 4: 42).

Everyone who wins Heaven is thus saved by the grace that Jesus Christ Himself obtained for us. Men and women can only be saved in Jesus. Christianity, therefore, has a clear universal claim. "All who are saved, take part, though differently in the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through His spirit. The Christians are aware of this thanks to their faith, whereas the others ignore that Jesus Christ is the source of their salvation. Nevertheless the mystery of salvation reaches them ,through ways only God knows, thanks to the spirit of Christ. Concretely, through the sincere practice of what is right in their religious traditions, and following the directives of their conscience the members of other religions respond positively to the call of God and receive the

⁶ In Jesus there is the full appearance of the Word (CR. 49)

⁷ According to Vatican Council II (GS 41, 22, 38, 45) Jesus is the perfect person from whom each person becomes more fully a person (CR 47)

salvation of Jesus Christ even if they do not recognize Him as their savior" (cf Ad Gentes n° 3, 9, 11) (Dialogue et Annonce, 29).

3. The mission of the church

The Christ has established the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation, as a sign of the salvation that God offers to all humanity. Jesus, when teaching the necessity of faith and baptism, affirmed in the same time the necessity of the Church (LG. 14). This is the special place of the action of the Holy Spirit (CR. 56).

As for the 2nd Vatican Council, The Church is related to the whole humanity. "All men are called to this catholic unity of the people of God, this unity that announce and promote the universal peace, and to this unity are related in many ways, the catholic believers, the others who have faith in Jesus Christ, and finally all men who are called to be saved by the grace of God (LG. 13).

When mentioning those who are not Christians, the last Council distinguishes them in 4 groups, that are related in different ways to the people of God, and thus concerned by the saving will of God :the Jews, the Muslims, and those who, by no mistake of theirs, do not know the Gospel nor the Church, but nevertheless seek God sincerely, and try to accomplish in their acts His will that they know through the directives of their conscience. (LG. 16). And finally, those who have not reached the final knowledge of God and try to live in righteousness (LG. 16).

The affirmation of the belonging of these four groups of non Christian to the people of God, is based on the fact that the universal call for salvation, conceals in itself the call to the catholicity of the unique people of God (LG. 13). All this is based on the Christ, the unique mediator who is present for us in His body which is the Church (the International Theological Commission: Christianity and the religions, 64-70).

That is why the Church conceives her mission as the one that the Christ himself has assigned her, that is to carry the good news of salvation to every man. If a person receives the Gospel by his own will, and confesses his faith in Jesus Christ, this person could receive the baptism and thus become a member of the Church. The good news of God is always proposed but never imposed. If a person came to know the Church but is convinced by another religion and does not want to become Christian the Church is nevertheless still convinced that she has the obligation to promote, regarding this person, the mutual comprehension and collaboration, for the previously mentioned reasons, that means because of the unity of the whole humanity, in the plan of God of salvation, of redemption and of the final destiny wanted for every man and every woman.

This explains why Pope John Paul II, in the 5th chapter of his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, mentioned the testimony, the proclamation, the conversion and baptism, the formation of local Churches, the interfaith dialogue, the promotion of charity towards the ones who are in need, as the ways of the mission, that means the evangelization. The interfaith dialogue is thus a part of the evangelical mission of the Church (RM. 55). Not only this is not opposed to the announcement of Christ, but on the contrary, these elements are related, and complete one another, while being distinct :not identical, not interchangeable. The dialogue is requested by the profound respect that we should have toward all that the spirit “that blows where it wants” has operated in man (RM. 56). In certain places around the world, the practice of the dialogue is the only testimony that we could give about Christ and the generous service toward the believers of other religions.

4. The Church is confronted to the fact of the religious plurality

The Church gives testimony of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world from a religious point of view. The Catholics represent around 18% of the humanity. The rest of the Christians represent 15%. The Muslims are 17%, the Hindus 13%, the Buddhists 7%. But these number are only general estimations. There are a lot of other believers: the Jews, those who follow the traditional or tribal religions, the Chinese local religions, the Chamanists, the Sikhs, the Jains, the Parsis, the Mandeens, and the Baha'is⁸.

For centuries, these religions have governed the life of millions of men and women. They have taught whole generations how to live, how to pray and also how to prepare oneself for another life in Heaven.

These religions are not isolated, there have always been relations among men of different beliefs. But nowadays, thanks to the modern ways of transport, to the communication technologies, and the movements of population, caused by the economical, political or cultural conditions, the communications among men of different religions, culture and languages, has improved a lot and intensified.

Every time, the Church strives to establish the testimony of Christ that is adapted to the given circumstances. She tries in every situation to be the sacrament, the sign or even the instrument of the union between God and the world, and the unity among peoples (LG. 1). The Church is award to be the servant of Christ, the King of kings, to whom the 3 wise men have presented their offerings. They represent the world, the nations and the cultures, that would find their end and their plenitude in the Christ. That is why, in contact of these religions that influence the peoples, the nations and the cultures, the Church teaches us to respect all that is righteous, noble, true and saint in them. She manages also to purify what should be purified, and rejects all that contradicts the Gospel. When such persons coming from these cultural and religious

⁸ Cfr. D. Barret world Christian encyclopedia, Nairobi 1982, p 6.

contexts take up the Gospel, the Church knows that it is her duty to promote a good understanding so that all that is good and that is concealed in the heart and the soul of men, or in the special ritual and the special civilizations of peoples, not only do not perish, but furthermore is purified, brought to perfection for the glory of God, the shame of the demon, and the happiness of man (AG. 9).

5. The saving value of the other religions

Now we can also ask ourselves, what is the saving value of the other religions. Do they play a role in the salvation of their adepts? Till what point, can we recognize this role? And if their adepts reach salvation in the particular religious, cultural and historical contexts where they live, how can they be not influenced or determined by their religions?

The theologian who seeks an answer to these questions, has for this aim the instruments of the catholic faith and the doctrine. God wants the salvation of all. Jesus Christ is the only and unique savior of the whole humanity. The Holy Spirit can operate in the hearts of men, and even in the different rituals and different religions. Every authentic prayer is influenced by the Holy Spirit. God can dispense His Grace much farther THAN the visible frontiers of the Church. And the religions conceal in them the germ of the Word as well as some elements of truth and grace.

The theological question nowadays is not to know whether these men who do not belong to the visible Catholic Church can or cannot be saved. Theologically it is certain that in some conditions, the answer is positive (for example when they are not responsible if they do not know the Church, and do not belong to her, when they are permeable to the work of God in them, and when they act according to their conscience and realize the will of God, (we should never forget that God is the only judge to these conditions). The religious plurality, the permanent deepening nowadays of the knowledge of the Christians about these religions, the limits of the propagation of the Church in time and space, and the certainty of the saving will of God towards the whole humanity, encourage the theologians to pursue their reflection on the advent of the will of God in other believers.

The sacred books of some religions contain some impressive passages. Some try explicitly to establish the relation between man and God, and the absolute and transcendent. Other prescribe fast, the sharing of some exercises of repentance and of spiritual discipline. The theologian cannot but ask himself whether some of these elements are not the work of God.

But at this stage, some precautions are necessary. Whatever the action or the presence of the Holy Spirit is in these religions, we cannot compare it in any case to its particular presence in the Church. Furthermore, even if the theologian distinguished a saving value in other religions, this does not mean that everything in this religion is

redeeming or positive. As written in "Dialogue et Annonce" to affirm that the other religious traditions contain some elements of grace, does not mean that everything in it is the fruit of grace. The sin is at work in the world, and thus the other religious traditions, in spite of their positive value, are also the reflect of the limitation of the human spirit, that is sometime inclined to choose the Wrong. An open and positive approach of the other religious traditions do not allow us to close our eyes on the contradictions that may exist between them and the Christian revelation. Where it is necessary we have to recognize that there is an incompatibility between some essential elements of the Christian religion and some aspects of these traditions. (Dialogue et Annonce, 31)

When doing researches, the catholic theologians should not consider on an equal standing, the role of other religions, and that of the Old Testament and should not consider their founding fathers as prophets sent by God like Moses and Isaiah.

Everything is not clear. There are still a lot of studies to do. But we know sufficiently to confirm, either the necessity of the mediation of the Church or the liberty with which God gives salvation to whom He wants.

It is evident that the Church, convinced that other believers can obtain the salvation, can also see the necessity to share with them the integrality of the message of the Gospel that is given and received freely. Aware of the difficulties ahead to stay in the right line of the religious vision, and loyal to the moral truth, considering the activity of the devil and the weaknesses of man as a fruit of the original sin, and to promote the glory of God and the salvation of all these men, the Church remembers the commandment of our Lord who said : preach the Gospel to every creature (Mc 16: 15) she strives with solicitude to develop the missions (LG. 16).

Conclusion

The theology of world religions has not yet reached a well defined epistemological statute. Many of the questions remain open, and as a result, they need to be clarified through studies, reflections and more discussions (CR. 3).

Is it necessary to insist on the importance of prayer for dialogue? Prayer, understood as a living and personal relationship with God, as a mysterious encounter, is the condition for dialogue and a fruit of the same.⁹ In the measure in which one lives dialogue in a state of prayer, one is docile to the movement of the Spirit who works in the hearts of the two persons in dialogue (CR. 111).¹⁰

⁹ John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 33

¹⁰ This text takes into account a lecture of Cardinal Arinze, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue delivered in Beirut, in May 1999, at the University of the Holy Spirit (Kasik). It is also based on the document of the International Theological Commission entitled "Christianity and Religions" (1997).

Report on the Activities of the PCID: Relations with Muslims

By Khaled AKASHEH

INTRODUCTION

This report starts with the last Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PCID) which was held from 20-24 November 1995. It will attempt to cover the Council's activities with respect to dialogue with Muslims, but it must never be forgotten that the most important dialogue is that which is undertaken at the local level.

1. CATHOLIC-ISLAMIC LIAISON COMMITTEE

In the report presented to the Plenary Session of the PCID mention was made of the setting up of a Catholic-Islamic Liaison Committee. An agreement for the institution of this committee had been made on 22 June 1995, the day after the inauguration of the Mosque in Rome. It was decided that the committee would meet at least once a year.

The first meeting was held in Cairo on 30 May 1996 and on the Muslim side was organised by the International Islamic Council for Da'wah and Humanitarian Relief.

The Muslims were represented by the Secretary General of the World Muslim League (Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami), the Assistant Secretary General of the World Islamic Congress (Mu'tamar al 'Alam al-Islami) and the Secretary General of the International Islamic Council for the Da'wah and Humanitarian Aid. Dr Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, newly appointed Sheikh al-Azhar, came for the opening and was represented for the rest of the meeting.

On the Catholic side, besides the President, the Secretary and the head of the Islam section in the PCID, the Secretariat of State was represented by a specialist and H.E. Mgr Hanna Golta, Auxiliary of the Catholic Coptic Patriarch, represented the local Church.

Three themes were tackled: 1. The relationship between justice and human dignity; 2. The environment and human security; 3. Poverty and humanitarian aid.

Clearly, these matters could not be dealt with in depth in a single day. The meeting closed with several general resolutions.

The next meeting, organised by the Catholic side, was held in Rabat from 18-20 June 1997. The choice of Morocco was surprising, but we wanted to signal that it was not necessary for us to select a Western country, and furthermore, official dialogue with

Morocco was already set up. It should also be noted that the meeting was extended to two days.

The Director of ISESCO, a body of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) equivalent to UNESCO and having its headquarters in Rabat, was present for part of the meeting. On the Catholic side, the local Church was represented by Monsignor Jacques Levrat, Vicar General of Rabat.

There were two major subjects on the agenda: 1. How Muslims and Christians speak about each other; 2. Minority rights.

Many sensitive points were touched on: freedom of conscience, reciprocity, and mixed marriages. The Press communiqué drawn up by the meeting was very anodyne, avoiding all the embarrassing questions. The Rabat meeting provided occasions for visits to the King, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Habous and ISESCO.

The third meeting of the committee, organised by the Muslims, was held in Cairo on 17-18 July 1998. Two Muslim committee members who normally took part in the meetings were unable to participate: Dr Saleh al-Obeid, Secretary general of Rabita and Dr Outhman al-Twajrie, Secretary General of ISESCO. In their absence they were replaced by M. Tawfiq al-Sharif, Bureau Chief of the World Islamic Council for Da'wah and Humanitarian Aid (Cairo) and M. Abdullah Abd el-Shakour, Representative of the Rabita in Egypt. The committee received a courtesy visit from the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Dr Muhammad Sayed Tantawi.

The subjects dealt with were: 1. Duties of men and women; 2. Human rights and duties; 3. Rights of the child in the family and in society.

There was not much exchange on these subjects, and even less on questions of common interest, as had been foreseen. The atmosphere was however relaxed, and there was a growth of mutual understanding, respect and friendship. This is perhaps the real, if humble, contribution of these meetings.

2. A COMMITTEE WITH AL-AZHAR

During the meeting of the Catholic-Islamic Liaison Committee in Cairo Sheikh al-Azhar Tantawi came in person to the office of the Nuncio to meet Cardinal Arinze. He approved the creation of a mixed committee of representatives of al-Azhar and the PCID which had already been discussed with his predecessor. After this negotiations went forward with a view to setting up the committee. The agreement was signed on 28 May 1998 in Rome. Al-Azhar was represented by the Wakil al-Azhar (Assistant to the Grand Imam), Sheikh Fawzi al-Zafzaf and by Dr Ah Elsamman, Secretary of the al-Azhar Committee for Dialogue with Monotheistic Religions. The following day the Holy Father

received the signatories of the agreement and expressed his joy that the committee had finally come into being, and stated that there was much work awaiting it.

As mentioned above, during the meeting of the Catholic-Islamic Committee for Dialogue a courtesy visit was made to the Great Imam. This was actually the first meeting with the Great Imam after the setting up of the liaison Committee.

3. MEETING OF MEMBERS AND CONSULTORS

Profiting from the visit to Jordan for the meeting with Al Albait, a meeting for Middle East, North African and European Members and Consultors was organised from 30 November (afternoon) to 2 December 1997. 20 Members and Consultors took part. An invitation was also extended to a representative of the Jordanian Union of Women Religious to be present as an observer. Besides Bishop Fitzgerald's report on the activities of the PCID with respect to dialogue with Muslims there were also reports of activities at the local level. Two papers on the spirituality of dialogue from the point of view of Christians of the East and of the West were presented by S.B. Mgr Michel Sabbah and Fr. Gilles Couvreur respectively¹.

The meeting gave Cardinal Arinze and the participants the opportunity to make contact with the local Church through celebrations of the Eucharist held in two parishes.

4. CONFERENCE ORGANISED JOINTLY WITH THE AL-ALBAIT FOUNDATION

Since 1989 the PCID has been organising Christian-Muslim conferences jointly with the Royal Academy for Research in Islamic Civilisation, an organisation dependent upon the Al Albait Foundation whose patron is Prince Hassan, until recently Crown-Prince of Jordan. The sixth conference in this series took place in Amman on 3-4 December 1997. The theme was Human Dignity in Christianity and Islam. Three aspects were taken up: 1. The concept of human dignity; 2. A historical review of Christian and Muslim attitudes to human dignity; 3. Perspectives. The acts are due to be published shortly in both Arabic and English.

5. CONFERENCE ORGANISED JOINTLY WITH THE WORLD ISLAMIC CALL SOCIETY

Again since 1989 the Council has renewed contacts With Libya through the World Islamic Call Society which has its headquarters in Tripoli. On 28-30 April 1997 there was a conference in Rome on a theme already touched on in 1989, Mission and Da'wab. No conclusions were reached at the end of the conference, but nevertheless the frank exchange of views has contributed to the clarification of respective positions.

¹ These papers have been published in Pro Dialogo 99 (1998/3).

6. TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II TO MOROCCO

Cardinal Arinze went to Morocco in December 1995 for a commemoration of this historic event, organised by His Excellency the Papal Nuncio. It was an occasion for renewing contact with a good number of Muslim dignitaries.

7. VISIT OF IMAM WARITH DEEN MOHAMMED

Imam Warith Deen Mohammed is the son of Elijah Mohammed, founder of the Islamic Nation (known as "Black Muslims"). Turning his back on his father's racist ideas, Warith Deen Mohammed was reconciled to orthodox Islam and set up his own ministry. He has millions of followers in the USA. There has already been dialogue between Warith Deen Mohammed and the Catholic Church, mainly in Baltimore.

At the suggestion of H.E. Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, Imam Warith Deen Mohammed came to visit Rome in October 1996. He was accompanied by a small group of imams and by a member of the staff of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs of the US Bishops' Conference. The programme included visits to the PCID, the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, St Egidio, the Focolare movement, and to the Mosque in Rome. The group was present at a general audience and Imam Mohammed and his companions were presented to the Holy Father by Cardinal Keeler.

It is good to add that contacts continue between Afro-American Muslims and the Catholic Church. For example, at Pentecost in 1997, Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Focolare movement, was invited to speak at the Malcolm Shabbaz Mosque in Harlem, New York. Another meeting worthy of mention is the Third International Congress of Muslim Friends of Focolare at Castelgandolfo on 10-13 July 1998, which was attended by 200 Muslims from 23 countries.

8. CARDINAL ARINZE'S VISIT TO GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Georgetown University in Washington D.C. has recently set up a "Center for Christian-Muslim Understanding" and Cardinal Arinze was invited to give a lecture on 5 June 1997. He spoke to an audience, which included a good number of Muslims, about Christian-Muslim relations in the 21st century. The text of his lecture, which was given a good reception, was published in *Origins*, the official bulletin of the Bishops' Conference, and later released as an off-print.

9. PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

The official for relations with Muslims was present at various meetings as an observer. In this way he took part in the work of the Islam in Europe Committee, a committee set up by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences. The committee has produced two documents, the first on marriage between Christians and Muslims, and the other on reciprocity.

More recently there was an opportunity to be present at a joint Christian-Muslim meeting of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the Arab Group for Islamic-Christian Dialogue which took place in Beirut from 9-12 July 1998 entitled Abrahams heritage. This followed a decision to increase collaboration between the PCID and the MECC, and a representative of the MECC was invited to the conference organised with Al Albait (Amman, December 1997).

At the invitation of the Friars Minor, the official for relations with Muslims took part in a meeting of the International Franciscan Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue which was held in Sarajevo (13-20 September 1997). He also went to the first meeting of the laity of the Middle East held in Beirut (10-14 June 1997), having contributed to the preparation of it. The meeting was organised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity and an important place on the agenda was given to relations with Muslims.

Each year the Egyptian Higher Council for Islamic Affairs organises a large seminar with Islamic representatives from all over the world. For the last few years a number of Christians have also been invited. In July 1997 the official for relations with Muslims attended, together with Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family. The seminar took as its theme Islam and the West.

At the beginning of November 1997 Bishop Fitzgerald was invited to the French Bishops' Assembly where one day had been dedicated to the study of relations with Muslims. The Bishops' Conference will look at the subject again this year.

In March 1998, Fr. Akasheh represented Cardinal Arinze at an international symposium organised by the Istanbul municipal authorities. The theme was inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. He had the pleasure of being received by His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. In June 1998, the Fr. Akasheh took part for the second time in the General Assembly of the North African Bishops' Conference. This contact is opportune and useful.

10. TRILATERAL DIALOGUE

The World Council of Churches and the World Lutheran Federation together with the PCID and the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews organised a second conference on Jerusalem. Given the impossibility of getting Jews, Christians and Muslims of Israel and Palestine to a meeting in the Holy Land, the meeting was held in Salonika,

Greece, in November 1997. The subject of the meeting was A Vision for Jerusalem, but the reality of the situation in Jerusalem and the absence of progress in the peace process made the meeting extremely difficult. Nevertheless the participants were able to agree on a final communiqué.

Trilateral dialogue is increasing in popularity. In November 1997 Bishop Fitzgerald took part in the second interreligious meeting organised by the Alcalá University (Madrid) which took as its theme From Conflict to Dialogue.

11. THE COMMISSION FOR ISLAM

This commission, the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, has existed since 1974. It has been transformed into a "think-tank" for the study of questions arising from relations with Muslims. The commission whose members include the President and the Secretary of the PCID, together with the official for relations with Muslims, who acts as its secretary, and seven Consultors, meets annually. It has studied the question of prayer with Muslims and an article on this subject by Fr Stamer, one of the Consultors, was published in Pro Dialogo (no. 96,1997/3). The present theme of study is religion and politics.

12. THE "NOSTRA AETATE" FOUNDATION

The Council has set up a Foundation to encourage interreligious dialogue. The principal means for achieving this goal is the awarding of grants for the study of Christianity. These studies must be undertaken in Rome. This favours the development of an understanding of Christianity which is not solely theoretical, but also practical, and as far as possible scholars are accommodated in Christian surroundings (a college, or religious house or community). Contact with the Council is also provided. The PCID organises a monthly meeting where these students meet Christians and Muslims resident in Rome who work in the field of dialogue. Since 1991 the Foundation has awarded 17 Study grants to Muslims (8 short - less than one semester; and 9 longer - one semester or more; the awards have been given to 1 Algerian, 1 Jordanian, 1 Moroccan, 2 Britons, 3 Tunisians, and 9 Turks.)

CONCLUSION

Relations between Christians and Muslims take on particular importance as a result of the troubled history they share, the demographic and political weight of Muslim majority countries, and the spiritual links which exist despite the fundamental differences which must never be obscured. Christian-Muslim dialogue is without doubt the most difficult of dialogues, but at the same time the most necessary and perhaps the most promising. It constitutes a sign of hope for the future, but also a challenge. The PCID, strengthened by divine assistance, by the encouragement of the Holy Father and by the collaboration of Members and Consultors, hopes to succeed in this mission to bring about a future of peace

and collaboration not only between Christians and Muslims, but also between all believers and men and women of good will.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY INVOLVEMENT VIS-a-VIS MOSLEMS IN THE NEAR EAST

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I. THREE PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

1st Observation:

There are two tendencies in the attitude and behaviour of Moslems in the Near East region:

1. A rigidly integrist, fundamentalist, tendency which demands the establishment of an Islamic State, governed by Schari'a", the Moslem law, in basics and structure. This has followers in all milieus and in all areas of society: economics, politics, culture and the media. It is a call for a return to the golden age of Moslem society, in the time of the Moslem Empire which stretched from India to Spain, and which was in power for centuries. This is the vision and ambition of millions of Moslems.

It has its roots in the religious indifferentism of Westerners and the weak state of evangelization. The Moslem integrists see a field wide open for the spread of their ideas, and they grasp the opportunity to establish Islam as the only religion and the only civilisation, in opposition to the decadent western civilisation called Christian. In so far as it concerns us, in our region of the Near East, this tendency excludes and aims at eliminating Christian presence in the Moslem world, considering this presence as an obstacle to Moslem unity and to the establishment of a purely Islamic state.

But as it impossible for them to eliminate Christians, or to force them into emigration, they do everything possible to turn Christians into second-class citizens, depriving them of their right to participate in the administration and to occupy key posts in government, even excluding them from the army and police. This enables us to understand the so-called persecutions of, and discrimination against, Christians.

2. A lay tendency which calls for nationalism, not for religious adherence. This tendency has begun to attract followers among the educated classes, thanks to encouragement from the government. It is made up mainly of thinkers, men of letters, journalists and university professors. It remains, though, weak and limited, and does not reach the ordinary people. Nationalism remains the corner stone on which is built the relationship of the citizen to his country, and of the citizen to his fellow citizens.

There is deadly rivalry between the champions of these two tendencies. The integrist vision is confronted by the laicising movement. Fighting over the seizure of power and awakening the awareness of the young and of the ordinary people. Christians, understandably, try to support strongly the lay movement.

2nd Observation:

The divisions among Christians continue to be a stumbling block for Moslems in their attempts to understand Christian doctrine and morality. The multiplicity of Churches, all in opposition to one another and criticising one another, is one of the most serious reasons for Moslems not to accept that the Christian faith is true, and founded essentially on charity. Jesus said: 'By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples (Jn. 13:35).

Generally speaking, the Orthodox Churches consider themselves national, authentic, Churches and resent bitterly the presence, zeal and dynamism of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. They keep repeating the word 'proselytism' as the great crime of these Churches in their contacts with the Orthodox faithful.

Moslems wonder about the causes of the rivalries among Christians, and the efforts of the different Churches to supplant one another. In this they see the fulfilment of what the Koran had already foretold: 'There will always be enmity and hatred among Christians until the end of the world'.

It is imperative, therefore, for the Christian Churches to preserve unity among themselves, to respect one another, to love one another and to help one another in the proclamation of the Good News, so that the Kingdom of Christ may be strengthened, and to eliminate all types of criticism and opposition, so as not to be giving counter-witness to Moslems.

3rd Observation:

No one denies the positive and constructive role of the Church in Moslem society, especially in the fields of education, culture, health-care and social development. Moslems themselves greatly appreciate the contribution of Christians to the evolution, opening out and civilisation of the Arab world.

However, these efforts and various activities, good in themselves, remain isolated and disconnected, and they do not give the impression of a unified vision of evangelization, with a well defined aim. It would, therefore, be possible and opportune to unite the activities of bodies which are similar and are found in the various Churches, and so indicate a clear vision and shining evidence of the

apostolate of the Church, in the field of education, for example. This means that it is of prime urgency that we deepen our sense of Christian mission and of clear witnessing to Christianity in Arab and Moslem society.

Also, we must not be afraid to admit that the Churches, in the multiplicity of their beliefs and activities, lack qualified persons, specialists, in the various fields of knowledge and action. The different Catholic Churches, the Orthodox and the Protestants, must revise their system of formation of priests, catechists, teachers of Christian doctrine, and preachers, as well as of all who are involved in the various apostolic and missionary activities. Without wanting to follow the West slavishly, there must be no fear of opening up and renewal, while keeping intact both principles and substance.

The Churches must respond to the present needs of Arab and Moslem society, by an adequate and effective formation of priests and missionaries, who really belong to their country and their society, with equal attachment to their beliefs, their faith, and their Church.

The function of parishes in Arab society must also be re-considered. The parish is the primordial cell of the Church, it is the living Church; it impinges daily, in a real way, on the life of Moslems. The Parish Priest of a small rural village parish represents both the Church as a whole and the lived reality of Christianity for all the villagers, Christian and Moslem. As a result, the role of the Parish Priest is irreplaceable for the teaching and living out of the Christian faith for Christians, as well as for Moslem understanding of this. This means that each priest needs a sound human, cultural, doctrinal and moral Christian formation.

We must add to this the important role of the Christian family in Moslem society, and the shining example of Christian living which it can, and should, give. However, we cannot but be ashamed of the degradation of certain so-called Christian families, even in our region of the Near East which is supposed to be traditional and sound: free marriages, trial marriages, divorce and separation, abortion, euthanasia.

II. OUR CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT IN A MOSLEM SOCIETY

1. THE WORK OF RAISING AWARENESS AND OF EVOLUTION OF THE ARAB AND MOSLEM WORLD

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, recommended his disciples to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13-16). Christians have tried to put this advice of Christ into practice all over the world. Oriental Christians also, after the Arab occupation and islamization of the region, tried, in spite of all the well-known difficulties and harassments, to co-exist with their Moslem fellow citizens over a

period of fifteen centuries. They carried the standard of Christian civilisation, especially in the fields of education and culture. We would like in particular to pick out the Christians of Syria and Lebanon who, in the 19th and 20th centuries, were the pioneers in teaching, literature, journalism, printing, art and cinema in the countries of the Near East. On the eve of the year 2000 we feel that the Christians of the Near East have a specific mission to fulfil, a mission to enlighten their Moslem brothers and to be the leaven in the dough of the great mass of Islam.

The Moslems themselves see in the schools, institutes, universities and Christian religious congregations, centres of enlightenment. From that fact flows the missionary duty of Christ's Church towards society, of which it is a part, in the field of teaching and education.

We are proud that many prominent Moslems have been former pupils of our schools. Many artists and men of culture are indebted to our schools and continue to play a very significant role in Moslem-Christian relations. This means that we must cultivate this very important talent for the development of our society, which has a Moslem majority.. It should be noted that many integrists among Moslem businessmen and the wealthy, especially in Egypt, have established very modern language schools in order to displace our Catholic schools and to poach our clientele. Many well-off Moslem families who had sent their children to these new centres of learning realised quite soon that these schools gave neither the teaching nor the education which they wished for their children, and they brought them back to us, more than ever convinced about our work in education.

Isn't that both a sign of the times and a vital mission of the Church? We must place all our trust in Him who said: 'Do not be afraid. I am with you till the end of the world' (Mt 28:20). Our schools and institutes must remain as centres of enlightenment and of moral and spiritual renewal for our society and for our countries.

2. THE WORK OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

His Holiness Pope John Paul II said: 'Development is the charity of today'. It is another sign of the times and an authentic witnessing to the truth and credibility of the gospel and to Christians' attachment to their faith. All possible efforts must be made to intensify and update development works: health (dispensaries and hospitals), feminine advancement, small and medium scale industries, literacy centres, youth clubs and oratories, old people's homes, centres for the handicapped, all open to Moslems as well as Christians. It is in works like these that Moslems appreciate our devotion and so forgive us our charity. This is because these works are carried out in a spirit of devotedness and not for self-interest, they are just for the love of God and the poor, poor in all meanings of the word, and not for gain.

These works are the surest route and the most solid bridge towards real Islamic-Christian dialogue.

It is the example of the Good Shepherd, put into practice, which makes a greater impression than anything else, and makes our religion credible. Christianity is the civilisation of love and the foundation of all real and lasting progress, both for the individual and for the whole of society and humanity. The Church has a duty to bear witness to this by means of works of social development and to serve all people, and the whole person, following the example of Christ who said: 'I have come to serve, and not to be served' (Mk 10:45).

Our region of the Near East needs men and women who are totally committed to the cause of humanity, giving themselves, without counting the cost, following the example of Christ who gave himself right up to the last drop of his blood for all people and for each individual person.

3. A DEEPENING OF THE NATIONAL AND PATRIOTIC SPIRIT

Do we Christians, both people in power and ordinary citizens, have a sense of belonging to our country? Are we convinced that God has called us to live on this earth, in this country with a Moslem majority, to proclaim here, for our entire life, the good news of salvation? Are we aware that God has destined us to live as living and authentic witnesses of His well-beloved Son, in this part of the world where the incarnate Word, like us in all things, apart from sin, lived like us, worked miracles, but also suffered, was crucified, and died on the cross for the salvation of all, among a people and living conditions as difficult as our own. Then he was raised and ascended to heaven. He wants us to continue his earthly mission courageously and perseveringly, among our brothers and sisters, Christian, Moslem and Jewish, in this land watered by the blood of martyrs and blessed by the holiness of hermits, monks and doctors of the Church.

Doesn't the idea of emigration to distant countries in search of comfort and greater freedom haunt us and impel us to leave our country, which is counting on us?

Love of country is a quality which should be very much alive in us and should constantly urge us to work for our brothers and sisters, Christian and Moslem, and to unite our efforts so that this Near Eastern part of the world might be, in reality, a haven of peace and freedom and a living example of getting on well with Moslems, while we progress together confidently towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

For my conclusion let me draw attention to the following points, which emerge from all that has been said at conferences, symposia, meetings, at which we

have been present as Christian and Moslem representatives, or which are simply the result of our personal reflection. I summarise them as follows:

Islamic-Christian dialogue is a necessary development of our mission as Christians, consecrated persons and even more so as Vincentians.

Theological Islamic-Christian dialogue, based on the doctrinal fundamentals and teaching of Christianity and Islam, is to be reserved to specialists, and must not in any way be undertaken by individuals or communities who are not authorised to do so; otherwise it would be more harmful than helpful.

In our Islamic-Christian dialogue it is better to concentrate on what draws us together, such as prayer, youth, works of mercy, peace and social justice -as outlined in 'Nostra Aetate' of Vatican II- and not on matters which set us in opposition and run the risk of pushing us apart and creating debate and animosity.

The sort of dialogue to be set up between Christians and Moslems is that which is usually called 'Le dialogue de vie', which consists in balanced conviviality, life-witness, work in common in an atmosphere of cordiality, service of others with love and understanding.

What is needed for effective dialogue:

Removal of every malicious prejudice or any preconceived idea.

Living in hope, even in the face of contrary experience, as St Paul said when speaking of Abraham.

Listening to the other with esteem and respect, and not believing that we are the only ones who have the full truth.

So, humility

Patience, and waiting for God's moment: the Spirit breathes where and when He wills.

Assiduous prayer.

(THOMAS DAVITT CM, translator)

Work of the Austrian Province in Turkey

Many different views about changes in Turkey can be heard today. In my short statement I want to say a few words about the present situation of the country. Then I would like to point out what the Austrian Province is doing there and add finally a few personal comments.

1. Present reality

Turkey is a country of 65 million inhabitants of which only maybe less than 150.000 – two per thousand – are Christians. More than 99% are Moslems, but it is not an Islamic state, as the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Atatürk, tried to build up a secular westernized community. He abolished many forms holy to Islam, starting with the Sharia, and more or less put religion into the private sphere. While in the Arabic world a lot happened in context with religion and nation in the first decades of this century, Atatürk put something like a large layer of ice on the religious life of his country. Islam was removed from public life, but the countryside remained religious. With the development of democracy, however, religion became an important tool for different parties in order to attract voters. A lot of slow changes happened since the Fifties, some of them specifically after 1980, when the ruling military felt that a stronger stress on values of religion and ethics might help to overcome the bloody struggle between left and right of that time.

As a consequence the Islamic influence in different public fields like education and justice became more and more visible, and thus in the last years the defenders of Atatürk's reforms, led by the military, have been trying to undo what had slowly developed in four decades. The term 'Clash of Cultures' could be used, but not in the way Huntington does it, as it is not a clash between the western world and the Islamic world, but an inside conflict: Turks themselves are struggling for the answer if their country should belong to the western or the Islamic civilization. We are in the middle of that struggle now and specifically our education work is deeply involved in that question.

So far a short very simplified summary has been developed that does not touch important questions like European Union, the Kurdish question, or conflicting political visions like Neo-Osmanism (looking back to the greatness of the Ottoman empire) or Pan-Turkism (a vision of a Turkey between the Adriatic sea and the Chinese wall).

2. The Austrian Vincentian family in Turkey

The French Vincentian role in the Near East after the suppression of the Jesuits 200 years ago is well known, but what got the Austrians so strongly involved?

We basically came in like our Philippine confrere today in Beirut – working for the increasing number of German-speaking workers in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Both Austrian and German Vincentians and Daughters of Charity started their apostolate in the framework of the French institution. Since 1891, however, St. George in Istanbul has been a house of the Austrian province. A successful school of confreres and sisters, and an important hospital for the poor developed.

When the work for German-speaking people in Turkey became less important after 1918, and the large Austro-Hungarian province was divided into four parts, provincial superiors wanted to close down that institution. The confreres working in Istanbul convinced them that an apostolate for Turks in that new republic of Atatürk would be important. After the Second World War the number of confreres and sisters in the school dropped radically due to the smallness of our province; we could however get the support of the Austrian government, and presently 50 Austrian teachers are sent and paid by Austria for our school.

The Daughters' province of Graz had to close many houses in Austria as the number of vocations is next to nil, but still sisters are being sent to the hospital in Istanbul and a huge renovation is now taking place with the support both of Graz and Paris. Due to the economic difficulties of the country the number of needy patients – both Turks and foreigners, like Chaldean refugees from Irak, is constantly growing.

Education is presently the battleground between secularists and Islamists in Turkey. In order to take away from Islamists the possibility of influencing younger students the first 8 years of education were unified, and as an indirect consequence since last year we can only take students into high school at the age of 14. This has, of course, serious consequences. We are, however, collaborating closely with an association of our former students, who as Turkish citizens were entitled to open up a new primary school. It started last September.

We are presently 4 Vincentians (3 Austrian, 1 American, of whom 3 are teaching), 4 Daughters of Charity and 2 members of an Austrian secular institute with vows working in the school. Fifteen Daughters work in St. George's hospital.

3. Some personal remarks

Already at the end of my first seminary year I was asked by my provincial if I would be willing to take a teaching degree besides studying theology in order to work later in Istanbul. I agreed and started those studies, but when Fr. James Richardson visited our province in 1970 I asked him if being an English teacher in an Austrian school would really be the proper work for a young Vincentian in the light of our last General Assemblies, when the American confreres moved out of so many educational institutions. I had some questions about 'Evangelizare pauperibus' in an elite school in Turkey where all form of so-called religious propaganda is strictly forbidden. He strongly advised me to go to Istanbul, and thus I went there in 1977. I have been there for 22 years now.

I have become deeply convinced that this is the right place for me. Yves Danjou stressed yesterday the importance of the mystery of the incarnation for St. Vincent's involvement with Islam. This is my Christian basis when I do my administration work as a school principal.

The world of Islam is such complex area that will pose many questions to us in the coming century. Maybe we will be looking for new ways of contact in 10 years, as we are doing it with China presently.

If, out of strange historical circumstances, possibilities – even limited possibilities – do exist, we should not easily give them up. On the contrary, we should look for additional opportunities – I mention only our St. Vincent de Paul Society's work for Christian refugees in Istanbul – and develop them.

That is why we decided in my province that I would stay on in Istanbul when I was appointed Austrian Visitor five years ago. So far it has proved workable, stressing so the importance of the work for Moslems in our tiny province.

**The Institute of St. Justin de Jacobis – a Catechumenate
open also for persons coming from Islamic countries**

Province of Austria, C.M.

Five years ago we were encouraged by the former Viennese Archbishop Cardinal König not to send foreign persons away who ask to become Christians. From the very beginning we chose the way of the catechumenate that was required for adults by Vatican Council II. The first persons who were instructed received regular guidance for about four years.

A special experience of that time was the contact with a certain group from Anatolia in Turkey, the so-called Alevites. They should not be confused with the Alawites of Syria, who are very different.

We found out that the Alevites are much closer to Christians than to Moslems due to their customs and their style of life.

The independence of their community can be seen, for instance, from the fact that they do not accept the five Columns of Islam, they reject the Sharia, they have no mosques, no five daily prayers, they have no Ramadan, no separation of men and women, no prohibition of alcohol, etc.

On the contrary, the one group that is called Kizilbas, which means 'Red Heads', stresses Christian ideals.

The leader of their prayer is a Dede –the senior, meaning the presbyter– who is the shepherd of his community at the same time. The religious service takes place in private houses, and there they have the office of doorkeepers. There is no ritual cleansing of hands and feet before the beginning of the prayer but the question about fraternal love. During the service the Dede blesses bread and puts a little piece of it on the tongue of each of the participants.

They do not know the meaning of that ceremony and neither do they know why the Dede then blesses a cup of wine and hands it to each one with the old Turkish word 'dem' which means 'blood'. Nobody knows whose blood that is supposed to be.

Alevites are generally monogamous, and divorce is considered to be shameful. They only fast for three days –similar to a custom of the Syrian Christians who have their Ninive fasting up until today. In many houses of Alevites one can find pictures of Our Lady. These are just a few examples of their customs.

Until recently those people were simply called ‘Moslems’ –and they number more than one quarter of the whole Turkish population! The same percentage is found among Turks in Central Europe. Specifically those people come to church and ask for baptism, but many priests are afraid to be involved with them. We should be aware that within the last 6 years approximately 60.000 of these persons became Jehova’s Witnesses.

This is why we founded this ‘Institute St. Justin’. He is the patron because we started this work on his feast day. Presently two small communities in Graz and Linz are growing. They have regular masses in the Turkish language. Hopefully we will receive some new candidates for the catechumenate in September.

THE CHURCH IN A MOSLEM ENVIRONMENT IN INDONESIA

*By Antonius Abimantrono, C.M.
Province of Indonesia*

Indonesia is a country with a population of more than 200 million, about 7 million are Catholics. In spite of its great majority the Moslems have never gained more than 45% of the votes in general elections. How come?

Indonesians, especially on the island of Java, have a tendency towards syncretism. This has been so in the past when Hinduism and Buddhism came to Indonesia. The Javanese, forming almost half of the population of Indonesia, adapted these two religions according to their own view, i.e. Javanese mysticism. Even Islam had to undergo a similar process of syncretism.

Among the actual Moslem elite we may distinguish between the leaders that take Cairo as their model and others that follow Mecca. The first like to involve themselves in political activities, whereas the others prefer to remain active in the traditional institutes that live close to the ordinary people like the Tarekats and Pesantrens. There are among them those who realize that Islam will be capable of taking roots only if it adapts itself to the religious life and mentality of the autochthonous people, which is strongly influenced by monastic and mystical ideas from Hinduism. They therefore try to proclaim the Islam with the help of the sufistic approach used by Al-Gazali, Ibn Arabi and Mohammed Ibn Fadiliah, the great teacher of Gujarat.

Today, after the fall of President Suharto, many Moslem tarekats arise forming small political parties that never get a significant number of votes. Perhaps this may be considered as a healthy reaction against the past regime. Suharto, who was in power from 1966 till 1998, depoliticized all social activities. He reduced the number of political parties to three. This measure forced all Moslem groups to form one single party, the P.P.P. But it did not take long for the largest of the then existing political parties, the Nadhatul Ulama, to leave the P.P.P.

The government then created the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (M.U.I.) as an independent moslem organ, which as such profited from the situation and was able to influence the government. Suharto, who has a Javanese sufistic background wanted the Christians to participate in the government. During this period many Christian technocrats could be found in governmental functions and through the Center for Strategic and International Studies (C.S.I.S.) they had a great influence on his policy.

This situation was not favorable for the Moslems. And so, those that finished their studies in Chicago, Montreal, Al-Azhar and Baghdad returned home to launch new strategies, strengthening the "Ministry of Religion" and the "Ministry of Education and

Culture" with great success.

It is clear that Suharto did not only use Islam but he was also used by Islam. The growing influence of the Moslems in the government made it difficult and gradually impossible for the Christians to stay on. Suharto was aware of this and tried to counter the growing Moslem influence by letting the Ministry of Internal Affairs play a crucial role in the government. This ministry was dominated by the military on his behalf; one of its tasks was to appoint the governors for the provinces, all of them military men and none of them Moslem.

IS DIALOGUE POSSIBLE?

It is necessary to keep in mind that there are two unequal partners here: the majority of Moslems and the minority of non-Moslems. It is the minority that needs the dialogue and not the majority. In spite of all, dialogue seems to be possible.

- a) On the academic level. However, the results here are very limited, because consent and consciousness of the intellectual group cannot directly be transferred to the public. For instance, the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Malang together with the Institute of Islam in the same town held a workshop for their respective students about Javanese Sufism, the mystical union between God and man in the Javanese tradition. During this workshop some Moslem students visited a village with a Catholic majority near Malang, setting the Moslem minority in that village against the Catholics in order to prevent the construction of a chapel in there. As the national crisis continues, intellectuals try to find a solution to overcome the problems. Here too, a dialogue is possible.
- b) Dialogue among the Ulamas. The question is here which Ulama should we take as a partner in dialogue? There so many different schools. In the past one could distinguish between those coming from urban areas and those from rural areas. The first were western educated, open minded, while the latter were more tradition-oriented (keeping to the Sunnah and Taqlid). Now we find the Muhanimadiyah. The founder of this school stated in 1912 that the Catholic and Protestant missions had already operated in the 19th century, and even the Catholic schools at that time enjoyed privileges granted by the Dutch government, whereas the Ummat Islam remained fanatic and narrow-minded, following Taqlid blindly and reasoning dogmatically. The life of the Moslem is at a standstill, marked by conservatism, formalism and traditionalism. A change has come: in our days many Moslem writers contribute, writing in medias run by Catholics. The Conference of Indonesian Bishops publishes a monthly review HAK promoting interreligious cooperation and dialogue.
- c) Dialogue on the level of the ordinary people. There are regions where dialogue develops well. In other regions of the country dialogue is not much in demand. Generally speaking, the East of Indonesia is more influenced by Christians, while the

West of the country is dominated by Islam. Dialogue is possible as long as the minority is not considered as a threat to the majority. A region like Aceh, the northern part of Sumatra, is declared to be Darul Islam, the territory of Islam. Apart from the issue of territory, dialogue depends also on ethnic issues. Certain ethnic groups are Moslem, others are Christian. One of the great mistakes of the government was the transfer of thousands of Moslem families to areas with a Christian ethnic majority. It is like planting a time bomb; and this bomb has already exploded in many places. The Chinese, who are mostly Christians, make this still more serious. In times of crisis the ordinary people used to blame the Chinese for the disasters, as they control the economy in Indonesia. However, one must not forget that corruption, collusion and nepotism in the government play a great role in the economic crisis. The anger of the people erupted between 1995 and 1999: 485 churches were set afire. But yet, examples of dialogue even during these happenings can be given, e.g. after the burning down of the Santa Maria Church in Situbondo (East Java) the leader of the Ndlatul Ulama approached the parish priest emphasizing that hidden hands had done the evil. He offered his help with a group Moslem youths. In another place, while a furious crowd attacked the church, a Moslem family helped the parish priest escape.

CONCLUSION

1. Indonesia as a pluralistic society grows by nature and history, which means that the people there have to live in a dynamic balance of many powers.
2. Its geographical situation at the crossroads of many cultures, religions and political systems, has made the Indonesian people more receptive to influences coming from abroad, which creates a character that tends to be syncretic.
3. The Islam in Indonesia which follows the line of Ahlu-Sunnah wal Jamaah with four mazhabs or schools, is not as radical as in Iran. There is a great resistance coming from the indigenous mentality deeply rooted in the old Hindu and Buddha religions so that it has to be modified and adapted; there will always be a permanent tension with the local mentality. Most of the Tarekats tolerate the new models, shaped by the local leaders. Some of them possess the charisma of reforming and actualizing Moslem orthodoxy according to the demands of the new times.
4. Nationalism in the beginning of the 20th century favored the progress of Islam in the confrontation with the Dutch colonial power. The vacuum of power at the end of the colonial period made some Moslem leaders think about the possibility of a Moslem Indonesia.
5. In such a situation, the realization of a dialogue depends to some extent on the initiative of the government. Besides that, people live together in a dialogue of suffering, mutual sharing of joy, hope, sorrow and anguish. They are able to do so because they share the same injustice and misery and are supported by a same basic attitude of their

religious culture.

Testimony of an Academician among Moslem Academicians

*By Stanislaus Reksosusilo, C.M.
Province of Indonesia*

Since 1977 I have worked mostly in university circles. There are government and private universities in Indonesia. Since the Moslem revival in 1985 Moslems dominate the government universities. It is in private universities that we can cooperate with Moslems.

There are 10 Catholic Universities and many Moslem Universities. It is through my profession as a teacher of philosophy that I have contact with Moslems. I attended seminars held by different institutes on several subjects: Management, Statistics, Culture and Politics. There I met Moslem scholars, who became close friends because of our discussions on those matters, without touching our differences in religion while respecting our professionalism as scholars. In this way the Government comes to acknowledge our position and has confidence in us in conducting educational programs for those private Universities.

1. For the past five years, I have held the function of Coordinator of Public Examinations in philosophical subjects for private universities in the region of Java, South Borneo and Bali.

2. Another activity is conducting seminars on more specific issues of Dialogue between Buddhism - Islam - Christianity. During these meetings Moslem scholars express their belief and their ideas.

3. We let our own students go and visit Moslem universities.

4. The program for our students gives them knowledge of Islam, in such a way that they remain faithful, and yet more open to Islam.

5. At the international level, I am a member of the "Afro-Asian Philosophical Association" since 1985, which has its center in Cairo, Egypt. The aim of this association is to enlighten Moslems and scholars from other faiths and to open their minds to a wider horizon. Our topics are:

- Living in a multicultural society
- Islam, is it a way of peace, or a way of war?
- Reason and religion.

I am becoming more convinced that through this kind of work, without pushing our own religion to the foreground, others will respect us because of our correct behavior and our professionalism. In all my

discourses, I stress only philosophical thinking and not the Church's teaching, except when we talk about the Moslem - Christian Dialogue, where I explain the Christian principles.

I am convinced that the way of meeting Moslems is not by debating certain issues of religion, but by being friendly a person and by a high degree of professionalism.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ISLAM IN MOZAMBIQUE

*by Manuel Velo, C.M.
Province of Salamanca*

1. The Country.

Mozambique is a country of 800,000 km² in the southeast of Africa across from Madagascar, with some 2,500 km of coast along the Indian Ocean. By land it borders with six countries, all English speaking: Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and South Africa. In 1997 it had some 17 million inhabitants, 75% of them under fifteen years of age. The official language of Portuguese lends unity to a country formed by sixteen language groups with their respective tongues. The approximate rate of illiteracy is 78%; only a minority knows the national language.

Some years ago the per capita income was \$70.00. According to official statistics it was the poorest country in the world. After seven years of peace and political democracy, the economy is improving. Despite its great natural wealth, it imports 90% of the goods it consumes. In general the natural products are not processed in the country but rather are exported as raw material, exploited by foreign countries or left untouched due to lack of resources.

The capital Maputo near the Republic of South Africa receives capital investments and strives to be like any other western capital. The rest of the country, especially north of the Zambeze River, receives what is left over in the South and lives in abandon. The scandalous differences between North and South are provoking ethnic rivalries and feelings that could initiate the fragmentation of the country or organized political violence.

2. History of the Land.

Until 1500 we knew nothing of its occupants. There remains no archeological evidence. Only some prehistoric cave paintings discovered by a missionary in Namapa show that Mozambique was inhabited from early time by tribes that lived by hunting and fruit harvesting.

Mozambique was "discovered" in 1498 by Vasco de Gama, who arrived at the current island of Mozambique on his trip toward India. He stays there for several weeks. The place will serve as a port of rest and commerce on future expeditions and, with time, will become the capital of Eastern Africa. At the end of the 19th Century the capital is established in Lourenço Marques in the South. In its trade with India, Portugal takes advantage of the strategic situation of the country and begins to dominate the adjoining populations and then the route of the Zambeze River, searching for the deposits of gold of Monomotapa, 1000 kilometers to the West.

On the eastern coast for more than five centuries live Arab merchants and

Moslem mestizos. Their relation with the tribes of the Interior is sporadic. They live together peacefully and independently.

Mozambique is formed by various Bantú tribes, each one of which has its own customs and ancestral traditions. These groups roam the land with their flocks or make war in order to survive. During the last five centuries, three groups have lived together in dynamic harmony creating a multiracial society that is tolerant and open: the Moslem populations situated near the sea and dedicated to commerce, the Black tribes and the Portuguese, owners of political power.

In 1975 after many years of guerilla activity, the FRELIMO (Liberation Front of Mozambique) gains independence and takes power. The people live a passing euphoria. The Marxist government distances itself from the West and breaks with history and ancestral traditions. Basic goods become scarce, ideological persecution, forced atheism and general decadence begin. A new guerilla movement emerges, the RENAMO (National Resistance of Mozambique) which does not seek power but rather tries to change the attitude of the government. The country and all the structures which had remained from Colonial times are destroyed rapidly.

In 1992 through the mediation of the Church (Community of Saint Egidio) the government and guerillas sign for peace. In 1994 FRELIMO obtains power after the first democratic elections. Hope and optimism are felt and national reconciliation begins. But in the last five years hopes have converted into skepticism due to social injustices, extreme capitalism and public corruption. Today the Church is for many the only road of salvation.

3. History of the Church.

Evangelization in Mozambique goes together with Portuguese colonization. From the beginning some priests accompanied the expedition of Vasco de Gama to lend spiritual assistance.

Islam was the religion of the commercial minority situated in the coast. The Black tribes of the Interior practiced their traditional rites and cults to the ancestors. The Portuguese desire to live their Christian faith and bring priests to celebrate the sacraments. From the beginning the priests are aware that they have not come to evangelize or convert the inhabitants, rather to sustain the faith of the Portuguese citizens.

During these five centuries there were various attempts at evangelization. They were not the result of a systematic program sustained by religious or political structures, but rather were born of the audacity of charismatic individuals. One attempt of the Jesuits towards the middle of the 17th century was at the point of gaining the conversion of Monomopata (Tete) but finally failed. The evangelization of Mozambique has suffered from carelessness, abandon, methodological errors and inadequate attitudes.

In 1940 after the concordat between the Holy See and Portugal, the evangelization of the country begins, then a dependent province. Missionary congregations arrive and initiate high schools, seminaries, missions, hospitals, elementary and boarding-schools. The influence of the Church reaches the furthest corners of the country, offering the population opportunities before unknown. The Church is a road of social progress.

With independence and the restoration of Marxism, many missionaries were expelled and returned to their countries. The seminarians were "nationalized" and sent to distinct countries in order to be formed according to the socialist spirit and, in the future, exercise important roles in the government. 90% of the Catholics abandoned their faith. The Whites fled and the missionaries were confined to the cities under vigilance and limited in their rights.

Since 1989 the Church began to recuperate its voice and prestige and gained the confidence of the government. The authorities gave the Church the responsibility for education, health and the human promotion of the population, not for its liking but for necessity. Again the missionaries arrived from Europe, people who had not lived the revolution. So begins an attempt at new evangelization.

4. The Vincentian Family in Mozambique

Currently there are present almost all of the branches of the Vincentian Family: Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, Saint Vincent de Paul Society, International Association of Charity, Vincentian Marian Youth and the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

The Congregation arrived in Mozambique in 1940. It was called by the bishops to direct the seminaries and the technical school of Magude and to attend the rural communities of the district. Among the activities realized what stands out for its importance is formation in the seminaries. Almost all of the seminarians of Mozambique from 1940 to 1975 were formed by the Vincentians: Magude, Namaacha, Lourenço Marques, Nicoadala. Then the Congregation committed itself not to accept native vocations, but rather to direct all the young candidates toward the dioceses. There is one exception: Father German Grachane, current bishop of Nacala.

The Congregation is present through three autonomous groups: the Vice-Province of Mozambique (19 confreres from 6 nationalities), a community from the Province of Sakamance in Nacala (2 confreres) and another from the Province of Mexico in Chongoene (4 confreres). The Congregation collaborates in the entire country with the Daughters of Charity and the lay Vincentians.

In 1946 the Daughters of Charity arrived to serve the poor of the suburbs of the capital, attend the schools and work in health care. Today they form a Province with 60 sisters, -20 of them Mozambique- and 10 communities. They work in 4 dioceses (Maputo, Xai-Xai, Tete and Nacala) and dedicate themselves to child education, health care, youth formation, promotion of women, evangelization and catechetics. Until now

the Daughters of Charity have been established only in places where the Congregation of the Mission is present.

5. Contact with Islam

In the south the Moslems are a minority which still does not draw the attention of the Church. Their attitudes are a concern but they lack demographic weight. On the contrary for the last five centuries on the northern coast almost all the inhabitants belong by tradition to Islam. Although they do not practice their religion, they were born in an Islamic tradition and consider themselves Moslems.

Seven years ago in Nacala there existed a daily relation of peaceful collaboration between Christians and Moslems. There were no reciprocal criticisms: each community lived its faith without interfering with the other and both united to defend themselves against antireligion attacks.

With the war finished, The African Moslem Agency began an intense campaign of expansion: Islamic propaganda among believers of other confessions, strengthening of the religious commitment of the Moslems, schooling of the children in the madrasa, formation of their own in the Islamic School of Nacala, works with an ideological influence, proliferation of mosques, wells in Moslem villages, gifts for the converts, criticism of the Catholic Church, attitudes of intolerance. Various Moslem missionaries sustain and direct this Islamic action and they do it with competence and success. In the last seven years Islamic signs have increased enormously: mosques, Arab style clothing, means of social communication, assiduity in prayer, high lighting Fridays and Islamic feasts. Intolerance has appeared and rapidly extended. Some years ago in the villages some Moslems participated in our Eucharistic celebrations; today they are few.

Nonetheless in the middle of this rare atmosphere, Moslems feel questioned by the example of charity, without distinction of creed, of our communities, by the education which the Catholic Church offers, by the vernacular language (Macua and Portuguese) and the songs in the liturgy, by the attention and leadership of the youth. Guided by the action of the Holy Spirit, they show interest for Christianity.

At the same time Christians, being a 10% minority in Nacala, admire certain virtues which Islam conserves: rigorous fasting, assiduous prayer, the value of tradition and respect for the Sacred Book. This admiration allows for a certain assimilation which could become syncretism if organized on-going formation is lacking on the parochial and diocesan level. Today the lay Christians themselves are the ones who discover the road which the Church ought to follow among the people of the Book.

(JOHN CARNEY, C.M., translator)

**Inculturation taking place:
Experiences of Daughters of Charity of the Orient Province
-extracts from testimonies-**

*by Sr Marie-Claire Saad, DC
Visitatrix of the Orient Province*

The purpose of this brief introductory intervention is to point out the implicit sociology regarding the Daughters of Charity concerning the various peoples they serve in the midst of a Moslem majority. In this sociology we find an explicit declaration of aims and deeper attitudes, behaviours, signs and symbols which flow from a relational way of living. Through these we give expression to the gospel we profess.

For the last four years the Daughters of Charity of the Orient Province have been organising sessions of reflexion and of debates. They have been setting up pilot projects with the aim of investigating their implicit sociology in a way that will reveal it more explicitly to themselves and to the peoples among whom they are working.

The driving motivation which gave impetus to these movements of reflexion and action was the questioning which was addressed to them by the Company with regard to the inculturation of their charism in a world of change. In the course of those four years, inculturation became the driving force which motivated the Daughters of Charity of the Orient Province to analyse themselves and their works in order to gauge the effectiveness of what they want to achieve with regard to their mission and the peoples they serve.

What we would wish for, as Daughters of Charity, is to live Christ in the simplest way possible, with much modesty and humility, so that inculturation becomes visible in a living out of poverty. What we have tried to do is to accept poverty as a means of witnessing successfully. Through our poverty we tried to come face to face with neediness as a result of becoming dispossessed in order to be able to share our lives with the poor while developing our spiritual and human richness.

That is how we tried to live Christ and to transmit him through our words and actions. We feel however that we have worked to bring towards us the people we serve rather than to go ourselves towards them and to understand them in their cultures and to affirm the values they profess.

Inculturation is first of all a matter of seeing ourselves as actors who bear messages and values which are made palpable through particular cultural expressions picked up by people who express themselves differently. So the

question then came up of training ourselves for listening, through their own cultures, to the people we serve, in order to grasp their own personal worth. Next, it was a question of recognising the messages and the values of these people and of helping them to live them more deeply, through greater openness. In this way there could be a real meeting and a discovery of Christ at these levels, once made free from cultural ambiguities.

Our experiences continue to be observed and analysed at these three levels, namely observing ourselves, observing others, forming ourselves to listen to cultures and values, and to meet one another beyond our implied cultures. This helps us to keep a check on ourselves continually and to revise our approaches by making adjustments in response to the changes which arise in different contexts in which we serve. Also drawing closer to the people touched by our works so that we may all meet together in Christ.

The experiences which are reported here concern the following countries: Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Holy Land.

Daughters of Charity in Syria

How are we to speak of our activities in Syria? (A country with a Moslem majority where there are 10 to 15 % of Christians of different rites). I can give a few examples from the high points of the school year: Christmas, Ramadan and Easter.

With the aim of enabling the most needy to participate in the joy of Christmas, the sisters and the teachers encouraged the pupils to go out to the poor. Not simply to give them a present like they themselves receive at Christmas, but to become imaginative in order to know what to put into the parcel (toy, material for school, dress or jeans, pullovers, delicacies, soap, toilet articles....), then to wrap it in gift paper, decorate it and bring it themselves to an orphanage. Sister's office became a depot and the children stayed in during recreation so busy were they in their preparations.

At the start this was limited to one class, Seventh, and a Greek Orthodox orphanage for boys. The other classes wanted to do the same, and so two other orphanages came on the list: a Greek Catholic orphanage and a girls' Greek Orthodox orphanage.

Among our children we also had Moslems who took part in this gift-giving; and they are very generous. With Ramadan approaching, our professor of Moslem religion made arrangements with a Moslem orphanage of 150 children. They agreed readily and received us with open arms. Not wanting to be too demanding they indicated only two classes out of six. After having celebrated with them and

distributed the gifts, our children felt pity for the others who had received nothing. Back in school they recounted what they had done and all the classes combined in order to give something to those who had received nothing. When they returned to the orphanage it was the director and the staff who were the most deeply touched by this gesture.

The Sudanese refugees were also given their part on the occasion of a free day. This took place in the convent playground. The children organised for them a sort of fair in which everyone received a parcel. Dads and mums weren't forgotten. The greatest joy was to see the parents who were awaiting their children's return. They were so happy to see their children so full of enjoyment that tears were in their eyes. And they thanked us deeply for having sensitised the children to the making of such a humane gesture in a world which is so materialistic.

Our experience as Daughters of Charity in Syria leads us fundamentally to revise our role of serving in society. Aren't we called to appreciate deeply the values of Christian and Moslem Arabs which find specific expression in Syria through the dominant culture, and to make the general populace buy into these values, by specially inviting Christians to affirm this?

The Christians in Syria are consequently called upon to make their own contribution to society, by rediscovering their difficult but characteristic role whereby they hold a special identity as "Christian Arabs", in a society which has a Moslem majority with whom for centuries they've been forming one single society.

Their mission assumes two fundamental aspects: intensification of ecumenical efforts involving a common and frequent exchange on the principal socio-political problems, as well as the opening of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue with Islam and Moslems.

In this regard there's an urgent need for the churches to develop an awareness of the need for more and more collaboration which overcomes ancient rivalries. Also a firm sense of community involving an effort to work out common pastoral projects and establish links with the society and the country in which they exist.

Daughters of Charity in Egypt

In spite of the diversity of rites the Christians in Egypt strive to give witness to unity by developing common initiatives (Bible translation, manuals for religion teaching, uniform calendar...)

Nowadays the relationship between Copts and Moslems is important for all, but it is not automatic or evident. For example, although the Copt community is

clearly in the minority, it refuses to consider itself as such. That is why this is seen as a challenge offered to all who expect from the Copts and Moslems an explicit determination to maintain what it is agreed to call "national unity".

As a matter of fact Christians and Moslems often share the same building, often the same schools and even the same work-places. They share the same culture and are confronted by the same problems. In spite of great difficulties, both parties can be seen to be developing a clear and sincere determination to live together (at the levels of intellectual class, of populist class, of the nation, of religion).

How are we to incarnate our love for God? Through our simple daily acts of service, through literacy courses and the advancement of women, we are struggling against ignorance. We are trying to help women and girls to become agents of their own advancement through their learning a trade, through economic projects, courses in hygiene and in general living. Because in our society the woman is often kept down; she is not recognized as a person having her own dignity and her place in society.

Our social centres are frequented by veiled Moslem women as well as by Christian women. At the start the latter were off-put by the former, they tended to keep to themselves. But living together means a joining of hands in order to build up society which constitutes the family of tomorrow. This is realised through mutual aid, solidarity and sharing.

A few examples by way of illustration:

- Fatma, a young Moslem was getting married. Teresa and her friends offered to help her to prepare her trousseau.
- Zeinab admits frankly that she detests Christians and says she comes to the centre solely for her own personal interest. At the end of a certain time she discovers, thanks to Mary, a committed Christian, that fraternity is better than hate.
- Our dispensaries offer quality service to all who visit them.
- Our schools are sought after by Moslems and well as Christians. Certain of our schools have up to 90% of Moslems and others up to 65% of Christians. Many Moslems have pleasant memories of our schools and are filled with a gospel spirit of forgiveness, sharing and solidarity with all others.

Our ten houses in Egypt are at the service of the whole population without no discrimination and no fanaticism. Through challenges and eventualities of all sorts, St Vincent gives us support and gets us to turn the medal when things go awry, and glorify God when things go well!

Let it be noted however that our experience leads us to bring Moslems over to our values in a way which makes these to be respected by them. Our wish for the future would be bring ourselves as close as possible to Moslem values, to understand and to love Moslems.

Daughters of Charity in the Lebanon

Our pupils in the two schools in Ras Beirut, "St Louise's", primary, free and mixed(200 pupils), and "St Vincent's", secondary (1150 pupils), are 94% Moslem. Of these, 50% are poor, 30% very poor, and the remainder are either children sent out of the big schools because they are not up to standard, or else they are middleclass pupils. They are divided equally between Shiites and Sunnites with a small minority of Christians and Druzes. The teaching staff is 97% Christian.

In addition to the schools, we welcome to our free dinners almost 50 old folk, of all denominations, from the local area. How do we understand our mission? Firstly we are a community conscious of being a presence of the Church and a place of communion. That's why we consider that our primary mission is prayer. Daily mass is a fresh incarnation of Christ in our local area. Along with prayer we know that it is the transparent witnessing of our community life which reveals Jesus Christ to those who approach us.

Our mission is in the first place welcoming and listening: St Vincent has nourished these attitudes in us as a second nature reflex. It is the Lord whom we are welcoming. Welcoming and listening to parents who come to us to talk about their problems and ask advice for dealing with their children and their spouses. Welcoming and listening to children and youngsters especially if they are victims of parental divorce. Many of them suffer from either the absence of their father when they are with their mother or else the absence of their mother when their remarried father hands them over to the mercy of the new wife, or else the absence of both when the two parents remarry and they are sent off to grandmother or aunt.

However our mission focuses especially on the work of advancement and education: education in gospel values of uprightness, welcoming, and respect for others in their differences, justice, freedom, friendship, forgiveness and joy.

How does this education take place? First, we base ourselves on the Moslem values which the children bear within themselves.

- The sense of prayer: the parents teach their children to pray, and often on free days they send them to the Koranic school.

- The sense of family and the patriarchal family....The parents love their children and the children love their parents.
- Solidarity: the sense of Umma, although this sense is in need of being enlarged.

But this education takes place especially through relationships (pupil-teacher, pupil-sister), and through the teaching itself. To crown all there's the philosophy class. A good teacher helps to structure the personality, create convictions, show how to organise one's thinking and behaviour in accord with this thinking. The young person discovers that he is a free and responsible person, possessing rights and duties.

Past pupils often come to see us. They are very grateful for the education which they have received. Many of them have become engineers, doctors, civil servants....This is our way of preparing for the Lebanon of tomorrow, a Lebanon of living together, of a meeting of values and civilisations, of forgiveness and of welcome.

Daughters of Charity in the Holy Land

What makes for the originality of our situation and is also perhaps an opportunity for change is that we are not working in a nation already in existence and well structured, but in a country which is fighting to get the right to exist, the right to be recognised as a particular entity: Palestine.

It is now more than a hundred years since the Daughters of Charity arrived in Bethlehem (1884). Today our involvement is seen in the following:

- A 40-bed maternity 98% frequented by Moslem women coming from Bethlehem, Hebron and the isolated villages where we have in the past four years organised weekly gyneco-obstetric consultations.
- A social service also started four years ago with the aggravation of the social situation due to the restrictive laws. It works for the advancement of poor families, 80% of whom are Christians, principally from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour.
- A crèche which accommodates 90 children, 55 of whom live in, aged from 0 to 6, placed here temporarily due to grave social problems in the family (death of mother after child-birth, repudiation by the mother, or great poverty), or abandoned and awaiting foster parents. 99.5% are Moslem.

- A home for unmarried mothers who are confided to us anonymously and in secret, either by the Palestinian social services or directly by persons who know us, so as to keep them hidden and saved from death. 99.8% are Moslem.

We work with the whole Palestinian population in general, but the girls and the children come to us especially from the Gaza strip, from far-away villages of Judea and Samaria. They are people from a poor social class, peasant or worker, often with little education or having a very strong clan tradition. It is composed of 97% Moslems and 3% Christians. It is very important to stress this fact, not through discrimination but because nowadays the first official identity to which Palestinians refer is that which is offered by their religion, given the fact that their nation isn't yet in existence even if a Palestinian passport is put into circulation. This makes it more understandable that the ways of acting and reacting in face of certain situations tend to be dictated by reference to one's religion, to one's book (Koran or Bible), rather than to a civil law.

Faced with these distress calls and confronted by such "inhumanity" we, as Daughters of St Vincent, cannot remain inactive. That is why we are trying by various means to be the voice of the voiceless and to exercise through our contacts a discreet but real influence on the drawing up of laws in favour of children and women. We are trying to get the influential people in the country to come to share our view of Mankind. To lead them to discover that every human being is unique in the eyes of God, each has intrinsic dignity and doesn't exist merely through being member of a community; every person has a right to respect, to attention, to love; and the smallest ones, the weakest ones ought to be cared for and protected by those who are strongest.

We can freely speak of our faith in Jesus Christ. But through our consecrated life, which already poses a question, through the gratuity of the love we offer to all and especially to the poor and through our availability in their regard, we stir up questionings in people's hearts and at times we bring about a change of attitude.

(Translator: STANISLAUS BRINDEY, C.M.)

The Daughters of Charity in Albania

*By Group of Daughters in Charity
Albania*

“The Daughters of Charity are devoted to the most abandoned, those who have no one to help them.”

I believe that this description which Saint Vincent wrote to Guillaume Delville on 1st February 1658 can also explain the reasons why the Superiors in our Province opened a house in Albania. It also explains their tenacity in the face of many difficulties, which arose in the struggle to carry out this decision.

Up to only a few years previously, little was known about the “Country of the Eagles”. It was known to be a very poor country which for more than forty years had suffered from a destructive cultural isolation, and was subjected to a harsh totalitarian regime. The leader of the Albanian Communist Party, Enver Hoxha, had seized power during the Second World War, and remained in power for forty years, until his death.

During these oppressive decades of communist dictatorship, religious persecution increased and became progressively harsh, culminating in the new Constitution of 1976 which declared Albania to be a “completely atheist state”, and forbid all forms of religious practice. In 1990 violent revolution put an end to the dictatorship. Freedom was returning.

As a consequence of the country’s socio-political order, and the more recent financial swindles, the situation in Albania ten years after the fall of communism, is one of continued technological and structural decline, as well as the ongoing effects of war; a situation in which everyone continues to lose out.

Some facts will help to clarify the situation. Surface area is 28,478 km² ; population is 3,256,000: 29% are illiterate; religions, 73% are Muslim, 10% are Catholic, 17% are Greek Orthodox.

Poverty and suffering are manifest in various ways.

- Materially: lack of infrastructures, no road network exists; natural resources are almost all used up; insufficient resources from tillage or livestock; there is no industry; widespread unemployment.
- Culturally: educational development has been blighted by the ideological censorship of the regime, and the consequent isolationism. As a result of this, the exchange of ideas, experimentation, etc, have suffered, affecting the various sectors of life, social, economic, health and business.

- Spiritually: the effect of an imposed atheism, while not extinguishing the profound human search for meaning, has weakened the religious impulse of the people which in its turn encourages human development and social cohesion.

Perhaps the most striking result of poverty in Albania has been the annihilation of the inner person, oppressed and cut off from hope. He has been forced to accept many constraints, deprived of meaning and purpose, robbed of initiative to further his own development and further the cause of common good.

Faced with this poverty, and in response to the Superior General's invitation in one of his Circulars, to each Province, to look to the needs of the poorest countries, the Turin Province undertook to investigate the possibility of opening a house in Albania.

This idea took shape in response to the request of the Apostolic Nuncio in Albania, and the Bishop of Scutari who were asking us to help in the dioceses under their care.

Having received permission from the General Council, and when our Visitatrix and our Director had made two visits to plan how we might affect the idea, the Mission to Albania began with two Sisters. They stayed with our Sisters in Naples, and then proceeded to their placement in Gramsh, a town in S. Albania. With a population of 16,000, Gramsh is locked in by mountains, and its arid landscape offers no natural resources, so that industry, farming and commerce are all lacking. The area is quite inaccessible, the poverty is grinding. There are 93 small villages scattered throughout the surrounding mountainous region, cut off from each other by a lack of roads.

Why was this small town chosen?

- a) No religious community had previously gone to this district.
- b) It is a difficult region where, according to the Apostolic Nuncio, only the Daughters of Charity could fit in.

For the time being the Sisters are living in some rooms put at their disposal by the civic authorities in Gramsh in the hospital for Contagious Diseases. The Sisters at once rolled up their sleeves and set to work "by the sweat of their brow, and the labor of their hands."

The gap between resources and needs did not dismay the Sisters, but spurred them on to adopt the most expedient methods. They began by sharing in the lives and poverty of the people, and working in collaboration with other religions already active in various areas of Albanian life. This led to the setting up of a small but functional health centre; the provision of basic necessities for the most needy; visitation of the poorest families; outreach to 93 surrounding villages.

The needs of the people are many and great, but the Sisters have focussed their energies on the children and young people, because the future of the people depends on the development available to them now. It is important to note that the majority of the Albanian population is less than 30 years old.

It is essential to develop the minds of the Albanians of the future, to build up their inner lives, so that getting to know the power and love of Christ, they may be able, as soon as possible, to take responsibility for the life and destiny of their noble nation. That is the aim of our Sister's efforts.

After three years presence in Albania, we need to establish more suitable centres for the development of the Mission and to meet the needs of the people. The existing structures: are not adequate to meet these needs. The new plan aims to provide centres which are fitting for "Our Lords and Masters."

In the town of Gramsh where a Christian presence has been established for the first time, our Chapel is a sign of Him who called us to work in His name as servants of the Poor. Our small community desires to make present everyday the Word of the Lord: "Truly, I say you, as often as you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me."

Truly, on the threshold of the third millennium, the charism of Saint Vincent has found a fertile soil in which to take root: "it is not enough to love God, if my neighbor does not love Him also."

(Translator: P. Eamon Devlin, C.M.)

ISLAM IN BRITAIN, a short summary

Daughters of Charity - British Province

1. Introduction

There has been a Muslim presence in Britain, for at least 300 years. Over the last 150 years or so the growth of centres of organized Islam and the building up of Muslim communities has taken place. The first Mosque was built in Woking, near London, in 1809. It is thought that by 1924 about 30 people regularly attended prayers at the Woking Mosque. There were more than 1000 British Muslims around the country, and 10,000 Muslims from overseas.

Now, three-quarters of a century later, the estimated number of Muslims in Britain is about one and a half million. By 1966 there were 18 Mosques registered and by 1985, 338. The most well-known Mosque is the Central Mosque at Regents Park. Land for this was donated by King George VI in exchange for a site in Cairo for an Anglican Cathedral.

In Britain there are Muslims from many countries of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, with the greater percentage from the latter continent. Muslim Centres and communities are established in various cities throughout Britain, especially in London, Bradford and Birmingham. About a quarter of the children attending primary schools in Birmingham are Muslim. The Muslim communities tend to be concentrated in certain areas, so in some schools the majority of the children are Muslim. A lot of effort is made by the schools and by the authorities, to cater for Muslim families and their children.

The Muslim presence in Britain has increased rapidly over the last 30 years, and it is continuing to grow. It is one of the aspects of Britain as a multicultural society, and it provides enrichment and challenges.

2. Interfaith Dialogue in Britain

In response to the declarations made in the Documents of the Vatican Council, and in accordance with its decisions, the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in England and Wales set up a Committee for other faiths. This Committee aims to promote dialogue with the many followers of the different faiths present in Britain, based on respect and a better understanding of the teaching and practices of these faiths.

As Muslims are in the majority, and there is with them a special relationship as children of Abraham, a subcommittee has recently been set up.

This committee is to focus more specifically on dialogue with Muslims and also has a pastoral role.

Each diocese now has an interfaith coordinator and there are in various places, and operating at different levels, interfaith networks. These networks work with Christians of all denominations to bring about better understanding of other faiths, and to discover ways of engaging in dialogue, and of working together, for example, in the promotion of peace and the settlement of moral issues.

My personal experience is from involvement with the Network in Birmingham, and Westminster Interfaith, the aims of which are:

1. to respond to the Church's teaching;
2. to promote understanding between faiths; and
3. to help Christians deepen their own faith by promoting greater awareness of other faiths through dialogue, prayer and action.

One of the most impressive events organized by Westminster Interfaith is the annual Peace Pilgrimage Walk. Two hundred or so people take part in this. Various places of worship are visited in different parts of London, and as we are welcomed in each mosque, church, synagogue, temple and other places of prayer, there is a great sense of the presence of the Befriending Spirit.

Cardinal Basil Hume was the Patron of Westminster Interfaith, and shortly before he died he sent a message to the Peace Pilgrimage which took place in June in which he said he would be with us in spirit.

3. Pastoral Engagements

Firstly I want to mention interfaith networking as one of the forms of pastoral engagement. Through working with others, lay people, religious and priests, the sphere of influence is widened and opportunities for various pastoral ministries opened up. In some cases we can become more actively involved while others play an important supportive role. Not only does it allow occasions for dialogue with Muslims, it can also be a platform for tackling moral and justice issues together. At the Birmingham Council of Faiths meeting in March a Muslim, speaking as chairperson of the Council and as representative of the Muslim community, promised support for the Jubilee 2000 campaign for the cancellation of third world debt.

I consider awareness-/consciousness-raising as another very important aspect of pastoral engagement. It can help to dispel fears and prejudices, and evoke interest and respect, thus helping to bring about the right climate, and pave the way for more practical involvement.

For many Muslims in Britain unfamiliarity with the English language is a cause of difficulty and therefore a call for pastoral engagement. For two years, while placed in London, I helped in the teaching of English to children of Muslim families from Bangladesh, Somalia and Albania. At present one of our sisters is a member of a team of volunteer teachers of English as a second language, ESOL, at a college in Hendon, North London. She says how respectful and interested are the Muslim adult student and writes: "The Volunteers ESOL that I belong to is for immigrants. The College promotes their welfare in all sorts of ways. It isn't just a question of teaching. I myself found I had to liaise with the Social Service, hospitals, etc. and write notes to postmen, butchers, doctors, housing committees etc. It's a great work".

Through our hostel work, day centres and other ministries, some of which are specifically refugee orientated, our sisters are in contact with Muslims. Although the majority of the children of Muslims families attend state schools, there are in some Catholic schools a number of Muslim pupils. A sister who for a short time had contact with a school in Peterborough, speaks of how the Muslim children there are catered for, and how provision of a special prayer space is made for them during the time of Ramadan.

In Sheffield one of our sisters is the director of a furniture distribution centre. This is a St. Vincent de Paul Society project for the support of families and others who are going through difficulties and cannot afford to furnish their homes. Sister has contact with, and is at the service of, the Muslim families who come for help.

Having spoken of collaboration with the SVP, I want to mention here, how the Annual General Meeting of the Society held in Bradford last year a Muslim was invited to address the assembly for the first time.

My understanding of the grassroots level of pastoral engagement is that it is based on the willingness to be open, and the readiness to relate to, to befriend and to assist, and to receive assistance; even when such encounters are fleeting, and of themselves seem unimportant. Opportunities for this kind of pastoral engagement are numerous. Muslim are among our fellow travellers when we journey. They are our neighbours, our shopkeepers and in some instances our colleagues, e. g., in hospital chaplaincy work. A sister living in London writes: "Our corner shop is run by a Muslim family and I frequently chat with the members of this family when I visit their shop. I find that they are very interested in our religion and are most respectful."

Our Father Director speaks of his occasional contact with Muslims and of how he is inspired by their prayerfulness.

My hope and prayer is that this session will help us and all of our

Vincentian family to grow in openness and understanding love for our Muslim brothers and sisters, and that as this happens, we will be more clearly recognized as children of our Father in heaven.

DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION WITH MOSLEMS IN INDONESIA

*By Sr. Aloysia Sri Hastuti, D.C
Sr. Christa Sunaryatun, D.C.*

BACKGROUND

Indonesia has a population of more than 200 million people, of which 80% is Moslem. Therefore, difficulties for Christians can arise when they want to build churches, open social centers, start projects of development, etc. There is also a tendency of making Islam the state religion.

DIALOGUE

In spite of all this, it is possible to live in harmony by doing things together, e.g. joining forces in fighting poverty and injustice, involving Moslems in social and educational work, maintaining friendly relations, etc.

FORM OF DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

Most of our houses are situated in Moslem quarters; the people in these quarters are mostly poor. As an example of how it is possible to work and live together, we mention here two communities.

1) The Regina Pacis community in Surabaya serves scavengers, who gather waste like plastic bottles and bags, etc. We began by visiting the head and his staff of this quarter. We offered the people medical sanitary services. Gradually they accepted us. We provided a place of worship for the children and at the time of prayer we urge them to say their prayers. In this way we avoid the impression of Christianization.

On the whole we try to make them serve each other, forming groups of volunteers. We support family planning, which is not always a success. To overcome economic difficulties in their families we help them by giving credit and stimulating them to save their money.

2) In Jakarta we have our Rosalie Rendu community, in a fishermen community. The children do not go to school as they are needed for the work in their family. So, we teach them to read and write in their free time, and help the mothers to provide their families with healthy food. There are often threats from Moslems outside the village, but until now the difficulties could be overcome.

CHALLENGE AND SYMPATHY

When we have to face difficulties, improving personal relations is usually a good way of solving them. We avoid all that could be marked as proselytism, which is not always easy. We try to promote praying together on certain occasions and to help together victims of flooding and other calamities. We hope that by doing so, it becomes clear what the Catholic Church is, and how Catholics behave in a Christian way. We may be grateful that gradually people do accept us.

The Christian - Muslim Relations in the Philippines and the Daughters' of Charity Apostolate with Muslims

*Sr. Nieva Manzano, DC
Philippines Province*

1. The Christian - Muslim Relations

I begin my sharing with a quote from the late Bishop Tutud who is considered the Father of the Dialogue Movements in the Philippines:

"In situations of prejudice, dialogue means an abiding and genuine search for goodness, beauty, and truth... each person must be open to the fact that one can be enriched by the goodness, beauty and truth found in the other. Each must be ready to discover the face of God in the other's faith...."

Bishop Tutud gave this message to the Christians in the Philippines particularly those in Mindanao because it could not be denied that one of the major reasons for the frequent conflicts between Muslims and Christians is the prejudice that Christians have against Muslims or vice-versa. Muslims presented Christians as land grabbers and oppressors who took away their lands from them. In the late 1940's, Christians from the other parts of the Philippines settled in Mindanao in response to the President's decree about Mindanao as the "land of promise". On the other hand, Christians considered the Muslims as murderers, thieves and dirty. That is why the primary problem of the young church in Mindanao in relations with our Muslim brothers is the problem of peace.

What is the Church doing to resolve this conflict which is now a national issue because of the Muslim's demand for an independent Islamic State in Mindanao? In Mindanao, the people are caught in the culture of violence, confronted with threats that are greater now than ever. Problems like starvation and poverty, environmental decay, militarism, inequality, underdevelopment, sexism, ethnic and religious discrimination all provide indications of the dangers the Church faces.

The Church believes in the urgent need to address this situation. This culture of violence must be supplanted by a culture of peace, a culture that must be defined by paradigms of justice, unity, respect for all cultures and religions, a sensitiveness to our ecology and spirituality.

It is in the light of this pressing concern that the Church in the Philippines especially in Mindanao took the following initiatives:

- a) Bishops-Wama Forum to dialogue among the Catholic Bishops of

Mindanao, Muslim Religious leaders and the NCCP Bishops who, in the spirit of inter-religious dialogue, affirm their common commitment to the peace process.

b) Silsilah Dialogue Movement to promote deeper understanding and better relations between Muslims and Christians together people of other faiths.

c) SALAM Foundation: Social and Literary Agenda for Muslims.

d) PAZ (Peace Advocates Zamboanga) is a Catholic organization with the purpose of working for peace, consolidating and strengthening good relations between Muslims and Christians and among all peoples.

e) Interfaith Dialogue Centers which are found in many dioceses and parishes in Mindanao.

f) Education for Peace Centers which are found in practically all Catholic schools in Mindanao with the primary objective of having peace education in the curriculum or integrating it in all subject disciplines.

2. The Daughter of Charity and their Apostolate with the Muslims.

The Daughters of Charity are present in two dioceses/prelatures which are predominantly Muslim: 85-90% in these two provinces.

Many of our works or apostolates are prelate- or parish-based; we are integrated in the pastoral work of the parish as Basic Ecclesial Community coordinators, Family Life Apostolate coordinators, working in catechetical programs, social and health services and above all in the education apostolate.

I am at present the administrator of a secondary school run by the Prelature. The school has a vital role in the mission of the Church in Mindanao for it serves as a point of entry to the Muslim communities.

We have 353 high school students. Sixty percent of them are Muslims. The number of Muslim students in the school has increased significantly in the past three years. Now they are conscious of the importance of good education which in the past they considered as a threat to their religion and culture. To make education for our Muslim students a preparation for a better life, for college and professional degrees as well as making it relevant to their culture and faith, we:

1. Integrate the most important Christian and Islam teachings in Value

Education classes. Teaching of human moral values is given primary focus in humanities classes. Values/virtues, life, love, forgiveness, respect for life, human rights, honesty, unity in diversity, etc. are talked about from the perspective of both Islam and Christianity. This is a beginning of interfaith dialogue with youth. The common understanding of such values as well as the acceptance of different experiences lead to a better understanding and acceptance of each other.

2. Separate religion classes. Muslim students go to their Islam class with the Ustadz teaching them. Christian students have their own class with the sisters. This strategy aims to deepen their knowledge and living out of their respective religion. In this way the Muslims are not afraid to study in our school. They feel respected and appreciated for their faith.

3. Have co-curricular activities in the school. All activities involve both Muslim and Christians. Important feasts of the Muslims are celebrated with Christian students participating; likewise with Christian activities. In fact, Muslims want to participate and take important roles in Christian presentations.

4. Foster the Parents' Councils Organization. We reach out to the Muslim parents through the school organization. We introduce some formation sessions in family life: caring and rearing of children; problems with adolescents; husband and wife relationship; role of women in the home and society, etc.

5. Make regular visits to the families of students. Muslim parents welcome our visit very much. Friendship with the family is developed. Trust and confidence are built between us and the Muslim family and the community as a whole.

All these initiatives have brought about a better understanding and harmonious relationship with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

In conclusion I can say that despite violence, threats and insecurities, the Daughters of Charity in Mindanao, Philippines, continue to remain faithful to our mission of witnessing to God's redeeming love for the poor, especially those of different faiths from us, with renewed vigour and enthusiasm, hope and love, as St. Vincent and St. Louise would want us to do and to be.

Christian-Moslem Relationships in Eritrea

*Sr. Letekidan Lukas
Vice-Province of Eritrea*

1. Introduction

Although Christians and Moslems are all over Eritrea, the majority in the lowlands is Moslem, while in the highlands the majority is Christian. The people in the highlands are normally farmers and oriented toward agriculture, while in the lowlands they are mainly pastors and nomads.

In general, ChristianBMoslem coexistence in Eritrea has a rich legacy, in spite of the continuous conflicts that occur. Moreover it was strengthened by the same fate that all Eritreans were subject to during 30 years of struggle. During the thirty-year war Eritreans tried to help and console each other without regard to faith. They worked with each other and, as part of their tradition, were hospitable to everyone. The bond of unity was strongest among the patriots who were fighting a common enemy. Even at ordinary levels one notices that Christians and Moslems interact without much distinction. It is normal to see them together as friends: gathering, talking, and working together in offices, schools, hospitals, etc. Among Christians and Moslems who were converted from Christianity to Islam one finds people belonging to the same tribe, using the same social rites and having both Islamic and Christian habits.

Before independence all the infrastructure of the country was concentrated in the highlands, while the lowlands were almost completely abandoned. Schools, health centers, factories, administrative offices, and other facilities were all in the highlands. After independence the government took a different orientation. The government had as a policy that all development projects were to be distributed throughout the country according to its possibilities. Schools were to be opened in remote areas of the country to combat ignorance, which is the cause of fundamentalist tendencies. Health centers were to be opened in the remote areas as well.

2. Growth and spread of Islam

We cannot speak much of growth and spread in terms of numbers neither for Christianity nor for Islam. There are not many converts on either side. Usually whatever religion one receives from his/her parents he/she retains. But in terms of quality, we can say that there is quite a drawback for both sides. This is due to the fact that since the government is a lay government, it tries its best to form young people with this secular spirit.

While the government is not against any religion, neither does it have a religion of preference. In fact, in government schools, religion is taught as a subject in all classes.

On the other hand, the government is well aware of the potential problems that can arise because of religion. To fight these potential problems the government has two efficient methods: 1) students= summer program, and 2) national service for everyone. Here it should be noted that religion is not the only reason for this campaign but it also serves to tackle other social, economical and political problems.

Every year during summer time all senior secondary students have to go to the countryside for development work such as planting trees, making or repairing roads, repairing the railways. All Eritrean students are involved in this vast project. What is beautiful in this project is that all students from the four corners of Eritrea, regardless of their religion or tribe, are mixed together in order to have a good experience of living and working together. In this atmosphere all kinds of prejudices disappear. Usually this is the first and only chance that they have had to mix so freely without the shadow of the old, closed tradition. Here it is worth noting that the government is investing a lot of money, energy and personnel because it believes that this is a healing project for the new generation.

3. Living Together

Usually both Christians and Moslems coexist peacefully, except now and then some conflicts arise. This usually happens in the countryside where ignorance is higher. Here we can speak of the old generation on one side and the new generation on the other side.

§ The old generation of both religions prefers to respect the boundaries of each other; each one in his place without stepping on the other=s field. It is rare, for example, to have a mixed marriage and, if it happens, it will not last long since pressure put on by the families is heavy.

Whenever there are feasts, marriages, or other occasions everyone is invited to the social. All eat together, both Christians and Moslems, unless dishes of meat are served. In this case different dishes are served for Moslems and Christians because Moslems will never eat an animal that has been slaughtered by Christians and vice versa. In fact, signs indicate if it has been slaughtered by Christians or Moslems, and no one will buy meat if it is not slaughtered according to the dictates of one=s religion.

§ The new generation does not bother much for these things. This new generation is the generation that joined the national service. During the service they are trained to eat whatever is available in the dish. I think that, on this point, the government is playing a good role.

4. Inter-religious dialogue

An official centre for dialogue in our area is absent though we can say that they have worked together on various initiatives that concern the nation.

§ For example, we tried to coordinate our efforts in helping the deportees from Ethiopia and we were able to animate the benefactors for this humanitarian gesture.

§ Together with our counterparts from Ethiopia, we tried to present some points of reconciliation for the nations (Eritrea and Ethiopia) in conflict.

§ Catholic priests and Sheikhs gathered together to help in solving a conflict between two tribes (Tora and Tsenadeghle).

The Tora are Moslems while the Tsenadeghle are Christians. The conflict lasted for more than 60 years. At the beginning the problem was just a land problem, but later it became a tribal and religious problem. During all these years there were many attempts to reconcile the two groups in one way or the other. All these attempts were quickly aborted. When the priests and Sheikhs took the case in hand the first thing they did was to animate the two groups in searching for peace. To promote this peace process the government has contributed all its efforts. Patriots from both sides have worked without reserve or any allowances.

5. Conclusion

Generally we can say that the relationship between Christians and Moslems up to now is tolerant and respectful. As Vincentians, we try our best to be the center of encounter for both sides. We apply this by giving our services to anyone regardless of his/her religion or faith. In our schools, clinics and promotion programs for women both Christians and Moslems are treated equally.

The Daughters of Charity in Tunisia

*by a group of Daughters of Charity
North Africa Province*

Tunisia, like most of the Maghreb, is a Moslem country where Christians are a small minority and for the most part foreigners. The Church was implanted there in the earliest centuries. Cyprian, Tertullian in Tunisia, Augustine in Algeria and many other celebrated names recall its vitality. Moslems were to arrive in the 7th century.

Today the faith of Christians is respected. The Church recognises its smallness, the paucity of its means and at the same time the immense richness which it possesses: the Good News of Jesus, to which it wants to bear witness and which is its essential hallmark for its meeting with the men and women in whose midst it exists.

The Daughters of Charity arrived in Tunisia in 1896 at the request of the Resident General in order to take responsibility for a crèche which would welcome all nationalities. Today we are 9 sisters in 2 communities situated in Tunis and in the suburbs. We don't have works run solely by the community but we participate in the mission of the Church through ecclesial institutions (school, Caritas which serves migrants, service to senior-age foreigners), Tunisian associations (support for the handicapped, support for school, support for abandoned women), or foreign NGOs. Due to shortage of sisters we have discontinued home care visits.

If the community doesn't have particular DC works, the local Church possesses schools, study centres, and a clinic. The work of the sisters, who are and will be non-nationals, will always function with some uncertainty.

- The schools: after independence and the modus vivendi between Church and State, the Church was asked to retain its schools: eight primary, one secondary, three technical schools. All the students are Tunisian and Moslem. Thus the schools have the official programme of Islamic education. They are inspected regularly. Two Daughters of Charity work in them. Some facts:
 - A committed Tunisian educated by the sisters was saying to me "I've been taught to give what I can, and to help; now I can't do anything else, there's no way out!
 - When children aged 8 begin learning a language, this is already putting them in contact with another culture, with people who are different; they begin to learn that their culture is not unique.

- Setting up an active method when the education system, and perhaps also the social and religious system, favours repetition, is not easy; but learning to reflect of oneself isn't a matter of little consequence.
- The Tunisian associations which serve the handicapped: one sister works with the deaf, two others with the multihandicapped in a local area association. The aim is through showing love to these persons to find the means of getting them to go out from home, to give them when possible some formation, to help them to reflect, to get them to be accepted in the neighbourhood and in their family.
- Service to women abandoned with their children: a slow working with these women is required so that they might recover their dignity; likewise with their child and with their family when possible. Immigrant African women in difficult circumstances are numerous, and a sister has answered a Caritas appeal to serve them.

One of the conclusions of our provincial assembly: “Even though we are immersed in a Moslem milieu we are all the more called there to live out the Good News through the corporal and spiritual service of the poor. Matthew 25 is a page of the Gospel which practise daily. It is the universal Gospel message which everyone can receive, whatever their faith”.

(Translator: STANISLAUS BRINDEY, C.M.)

CONCLUSIONS

*by Jean Landousies, C.M.
Province of Paris*

At the end of the session, the working groups replied to two questions. Here is a summary of their replies:

1. The most important things to share from what we got out of this session seem to be these.

a) First of all we need to *express the joy of having been brought together* as members of the Vincentian Family. We are grateful to Fr Maloney for having given us the opportunity to meet one another. This session in the Lebanon was a time of grace for the Vincentian Family. Here we were able to appreciate the warm welcome of the Vincentian confreres starting with the Provincial. The presence of our confrere His Beatitude Patriarch Stephanos II Ghattas was particularly appreciated.

Our different experiences enabled us to offer much to each other. *The life witnessing* of several among us, like that of the organisers, Christians and Moslems, held pride of place. We were able to be affirmed in our belief that in the mission among our Moslem brothers and sisters we are not alone. Throughout the diversity of our countries and cultures there are many of us working according to the spirit of M. Vincent. This provides strength and encouragement, and gives a new drive for us to continue the mission.

b) The international character of our meeting reminded us that *our mission knows no frontiers* of race or religion. This makes us feel even more responsible for our mission in Moslem countries. We also became aware of the challenge to read the signs of the times leading to a greater openness to all. United by the same spirituality and the same charism we held profitable discussions about the possibility of dialogue with Moslems at various levels.

c) We were led to *take a different view of people*, a view open to development and to knowing others in a more objective way. It is essential to accept the otherness of people and to have the skill of listening. What should guide us is a deep love for Moslems which would enable us to meet them with a favourable mind-set, knowing how to forgive and also how to pray for them. We are convinced of the possibility of living and dialoguing with Moslems.

d) With regard to *theology* we received much from the participants. We know how serious are the difficulties involved in true dialogue. We also believe that truly theological dialogue, which we should never systematically avoid, remains largely

the domain of specialists. But that should not stop us. Dialogue forms part of the Vincentian charism. We had occasion to remind ourselves of the teaching of the Church in this regard, and to put into focus the urgent need of always being authentic witnesses of Love and of building an ever more friendly world. We feel the necessity of distinguishing more precisely the link between dialogue and proclamation of the gospel.

With that in view we were able to come to know Islam better, and the diverse situations in which it is practised. This learning needs always to be kept up for the sake of truth and objectivity.

e) We were also led to be *strengthened in our faith and in our convictions* so as to live by these and bear witness to these. It is important to nourish and mature our own faith in order authentically to encounter others in their faith. And we became aware of how the divisions among Christians cause scandal and how necessary it is to work as much as possible together with other Christians, in a spirit of complementarity.

f) In the course of this meeting we brought into focus *certain spiritual attitudes* which we deem it necessary to develop in order to live in a friendly manner with Moslems. We had a deep experience of how Vincentian spirituality, based on the mystery of the Incarnation, is suited to this mission of meeting and dialoguing. What we are living out is the work of the Spirit. He it is who is urging us towards a spirit of prayer and a humility which enables us to discover the values practised by others. Also the patience to adapt ourselves to God's time which isn't always our time. Likewise trustfulness to live day-by-day sowing without expecting an immediate response. And especially of hope since we don't know the ways of God although we are assured of his active presence in people's hearts. Like M.Vincent we really need to be animated by evangelical prudence which drives us to learn the reality of situations, while giving us the audacity of true apostles and the spirit of discernment which will make us act and speak appropriately for ourselves or through others. This apostolic presence calls for qualities and competences which we have to acquire day by day.

g) At the end of the session we asked ourselves how do we now concretely realise our Vincentian vocation in the world of Islam. We've got to be realistic and admit that there are still many questions for which we have no answer!

2. Regarding the future, some suggestions and propositions.

It is to be noted that these suggestions need to be nuanced according to concrete situations: countries where Islam predominates or has deep roots, countries where there has been immigration, etc.

2.1. In the pastoral sphere

a) Our first wish would be that *a Vincentian presence might be developed* in the Moslem world, whether in Moslem countries or countries with Moslem immigration, and that the communities already existing should be reinforced, by going especially to areas where all has to be done, and in being sensitive to new appeals which are addressed to us. This presence would aim at the building of a peaceful society, by engaging in a dialogue of living together. This would entail the acceptance of others with their differences, and working to have them respected and welcomed even within our communities whom we'd have conscientised regarding how to relate to Moslems.

b) For ourselves as Vincentians it is necessary that we should be reminded at regular intervals that we've got to *make dialogue a part of our pastoral approach*, and that we should be agents of reconciliation in multi-religious societies, not allowing ourselves be enclosed in stereotyped attitudes contrary to the spirit of the gospel. We have to come to a deeper understanding of what mission to Moslems means. This has to be done with an analysis which is rigorous, and an approach which is sensitive to persons by recognising their religious and moral values. In reality it's a question of living out what we teach and witnessing to our faith while working towards the construction of some kind of unity in society, in communities and in families. Thus we show the fullness of life which Christian faith brings to people. To achieve this it is desirable that a new approach in mission should be developed in the spirit of Vatican II and the Magisterium of the Church.

c) We also have a *special role vis-a-vis Christians*, by informing them about Islam, by aiding them to distinguish between Islam as a religion and its being used for power-seeking. Also enlightening them at the level of their faith and strengthening those who live among Moslems. In catechesis with children and adults, it is necessary to help Christians to become clear in their conscience and correct in their behaviour towards Moslems and towards all others who are different from themselves. Likewise stressed, with regard to certain regions, was the urgency of paying special attention to catechumens.

d) *With Moslems* our attitude should allow them to get beyond the prejudices they might have with regard to Christians and thus contribute to a bringing together of both communities. When the occasion arises we need to explain Christianity in terms which the Moslems can understand.

e) Paying special attention to *the quality of relationships between young Christians and young Moslems*, was also suggested, especially in our schools and other places of education. This would allow both parties to come to know one another in a genuine way. The result would be a growth in mutual respect which would assist them in imagining how they could live together and peacefully cooperate.

2.2. In the area of social activity

a) It is desirable to *encourage and support activities* where different cultures meet. The social services will be of assistance in developing a peaceful living together with the Moslems. There is an urgency about working concretely to establish a future which is just and peaceful.

b) In social interaction with the poor, Vincentians should have as a primary attitude to *make no difference between Christians and Moslems*. We must address ourselves to all without exception. On the other hand an attitude of humility will enable us, while retaining our Christian identity, to avoid imposing our own culture.

c) In social work with Moslems, this should not be limited to support work. It is important to *know how to work together*, to get the poor themselves to serve other poor, without distinction of religion. Thus they will be moving into a cycle of solidarity involving Christians and Moslems. The creation or support of common projects will also be envisaged. A genuine effort at service will often lead to living with Moslems and working with them to help them to become autonomous and independent.

d) In this regard, particular attention needs to be paid to *Moslem refugees* who are numerous in certain countries; likewise to old people. Also pointed out was the importance of the witness and the work of religious sisters amongst Moslem women.

e) *Collaboration with other members of the Vincentian family*, especially with the laity ought to be strongly encouraged. This collaboration can also extend at suitable times to members of other communities in a spirit of ecumenism.

2.3. In the area of formation

a) *A following up of this session* It was first of all pointed out that this meeting was by way of opening up something which needs to be continued. Great support was therefore expressed for regular meetings of this kind. Once every three years was suggested. It does seem important to follow up the work begun on various themes concerning Moslems and contact with them. In line with this it is suggested that reflexion in common could take place at the level of provinces or regions for all members of the Vincentian family who desire it. The participation of Vincentian laity would be particularly appreciated.

b) *Initial and on-going formation in the Vincentian family*. It is desirable that in the various spheres of formation (seminaries, studies, etc...) there should be imparted a knowledge of other religions and an initiation into inter-religious dialogue. Because

of the importance of Islam in the world of today and of the challenges which it poses, an initiation into this religion ought to form part of theological and missionary studies. For this same reason, it is to be desired that sessions of on-going formation should also be made available at provincial level. In this formation the spiritual aspect ought not to be forgotten. There is a "spirituality of dialogue" which gives a preparation for meeting others! "Give me a spiritual man and he'll be capable of anything!"

c) *The place which meeting with Moslems holds in the Vincentian charism* was well illustrated in the conference of Fr Danjou on St Vincent and Islam. It is therefore a reality of which the Vincentian family should be aware. It ought also be remembered that the Congregation of the Mission has, in the Moslem world, a tradition in the domain of culture (Cf. Fr Bore', schools...) and in that of catechesis to reinforce the faith of Christians in an incultured language (Turkey, Lebanon). This aspect of our charism should also be present in what we do with respect to the formation of priests and laity.

d) *Formation of missionaries in culture, language and religion before they depart.* Particularly appreciated would be the presence of young volunteers. Young Vincentians destined for countries with a Moslem majority ought to receive a formation in the culture, the religion, and the psychology of the areas to which they are going, in order to prepare them for meeting and living alongside the people. Let them be given a clear idea of their mission.

e) In view of the small number who specialise on these questions in the Vincentian family, it is very much to be desired that *experts should be formed in the area of Islam and of inter-religious dialogue.* In the Far-East it might even be possible to envisage the creation of a small study centre.

f) There is a request for a considerable opening up of *collaboration between the provinces.* The aim would be to draw benefit from formation sessions, to promote a sharing of experiences especially in our various media, and to develop links between our provinces and our communities in the Moslem world.

g) Within the Vincentian family we feel the need of much more *information about Islam, inter-religious dialogue and our involvement* in this milieu, as well as meetings which have taken place at the highest level between responsible religious in order to promote dialogue. Numerous possibilities could be made use of, from the Internet to the setting up of a commission which could promote the diffusion of information through our own means of communication (Vincentiana, website...). Also suggesting bibliographies and projects which might help formation and information. In the area of information it is also important to sensitise our provinces to these questions which are becoming more and more urgent for the mission and, by promoting an accurate knowledge of Islam and Moslem culture, help to get rid of prejudice.

h) Finally, it is suggested that at the level of the Vincentian family there should be created *a commission for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue* in order to arouse and keep alive an interest in friendly and respectful meetings with those who don't share our faith but who are the object of our being sent to all nations as desired by M. Vincent.

In conclusion

These reflexions are being proposed to our superiors and to all of our communities, in the hope that as a result of this meeting, an official document, would be addressed to the Vincentian family. This should stress the importance of mission to the Moslem world for the Vincentians of today and encourage its members to become involved with this in a friendly spirit.

(FR. STANISLAUS BRINDLEY, C.M. translator)

Words at the End of the Meeting

by Ignacio Fernandez de Mendoza, C.M.
Vicar General

Some missionaries of the C.M. proposed to Father General the desirability to convene a meeting with the purpose of studying the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Already at the General Assembly of 1986 some references to this topic had appeared.

Father General adopted this initiative and brought it to the consideration of the General Council, after concluding that the present circumstances were ripe to organize something.

At the beginning it was thought to convene only the Vincentian missionaries. Later it seemed suitable to invite also the Daughters of Charity. Sister Juana Elizondo was pleased with the proposal and decided that the Daughters of Charity would also participate.

A commission formed by five missionaries in charge of organizing the meeting was appointed. It was thought that it would be appropriate to host this meeting in a place like Lebanon where Christians and Muslims coexist.

All of this belongs to the past. What can we say about the present? We have already had this meeting in Lebanon and in this house of Our Lady of the Mount. A large number of C.M. missionaries and Daughters of Charity have participated in it. Also a representation of the Vincentian laity have participated. We have also been honored with the presence of a Patriarch, His Holiness Stephanos Ghattas, three C.M. Provincials and one Visitatrix. Father General wanted that, in spite of his absence from Rome, Father Victor Bieler and myself should participate in this meeting.

During these past days:

- We have visited with expert professors, both Catholic and Muslims, that have opened the way for us to know Islam better and in particular to understand our pastoral relationship as Vincentians with Muslims.
- The Commission has succeeded in organizing with skill and not a lack of sacrifice a way to go forward.
- We have exchanged our own experiences in our relationship with one of the religions that numbers more followers today.

- We have prayed and have lived together as the meeting unfolded.
- We have visited several places in this country of Lebanon, and thus it has been possible for us to draw near to its reality.
- In several places we have listened to Christian and Muslim leaders, who have given us with simplicity their own opinions on the relationship between Christians and Muslims.
- We have visited some of the houses of the C.M. missionaries and of the Daughters of Charity. They have received us “ex toto corde,” as brothers and sisters. They can count on our gratitude.
- The meeting has taken place in this house of Our Lady of the Mount. It is a building with optimal conditions for this type of meeting.
- I believe the results of the meeting are very positive. We have discovered a somewhat surprising fact: the C.M. missionaries and the Daughters of Charity that live in missions in contact with the Muslim world are very numerous. We have received first hand information on the relationship between Christians and Muslims. But above all, our personal and group sensibility about this problem, after what we have heard and seen, is very different from what it was before the Encounter.

To conclude I want to briefly add the following:

Father Victor Bieler and I will inform Father General as to how the meeting unfolded.

I want to thank all of you for your attendance and active participation throughout the meeting. Thanks to all the professors that have assisted us. Thanks to the Commission made up of Fathers Roberto Lovera, Victor Bieler, George Bou Jaoude, Franz Krangler and Jean Landousies. Our gratitude also for the translators that day after day have repeated the Pentecostal miracle. A very special thanks to Father George Bou Jaoude, Visitor from the Middle East Province, for everything he has done in favor of this meeting. For him a round of applause . We thank the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family and the supporting personnel, that is to say, the workers of this house.

I conclude with a suggestion. At the crossroads of the ending and the beginning of a millennium Christians and Muslims coexist in many places in the world. Vatican Council II opened the doors for an inter- religious dialogue. With this meeting that is about to end, the Vincentian family has taken a step forward. Let’s not forget that St. Vincent had a great interest for everything related to Islam. Given the geography of the Vincentians and of the Daughters of Charity and even

that of the diverse Vincentian groups, I believe that in a near future we should convene again the Vincentian family for another gathering in order to continue the reflection on Christianity and Islam and in particular on our apostolate in the midst of a Muslim world.

In the name of Father Maloney thank you for coming and participating in this meeting. I wish you a happy return to your homes. Thank you for having listened to me.

(JAMES G. WARD, C.M., translator)