

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY - CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE by Fr. Michael FITZGERALD, PA,
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"Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding" (1).

So spoke the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. They were alluding to a long-standing situation in which Christianity and Islam had existed side by side, sometimes at close quarters, but more often than not divided into different camps. Misunderstanding was more common than understanding, suspicion ran deeper than trust. "Encounter" there had certainly been, sometimes with the clash of arms, but precious little "dialogue". "The two religions fought each other, writes Professor Zaehner, they did not think it necessary to find out about each other. They saw only the diversity, never suspecting that there might also be unity: they accepted the discord without worrying their heads as to whether or not this might perhaps conceal a deeper concord" (2).

Vatican II wishes to go beyond such a state of affairs. In exhorting Christians "prudently and lovingly" to "acknowledge, preserve and promote" the spiritual and cultural values found amongst the followers of other religions, it consecrated a trend which had already appeared in the Church, an approach which was given further encouragement by Pope Paul's first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, - the way of dialogue.

Now dialogue, to be successful, must be sincere. An over-hasty declaration of unity without taking into account diversity would be as disastrous as it would be dishonest. The purpose of the present reflections is to examine certain areas of belief, concerning Islam and Christianity, in order to bring to light both discord and concord. The task is easier than it would be in the case of other religions, of Hinduism for example, for Islam is one of the great monotheistic religions, together with Judaism and Christianity. Moreover it is a scriptural religion whose scripture, the Qur'an, originates within the same cultural matrix as those of Judaism and Christianity. It is likewise a religion which commits men totally, both as individuals and as members of the community. In these areas concerning God, divine revelation and man's response to revelation, both the common ground and the distinctive features can easily be discovered. However, before tackling these several points it might not be superfluous to attempt to explain briefly how Islam came into existence as a religion distinct from Judaism and Christianity.

The main burden of Muhammad's first preaching to his contemporaries in seventh century Mecca was the twofold assertion that God is the unique Creator and that all men are brothers.

(1) *Nostra Aetate*, no. 3.

(2) R.C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, Oxford 1970, p. 2.

Put negatively this means that there can be no divinity other than God and that the poor are not to be ill-treated. It might be said that there is nothing new in this. Is it not a mere repetition of the two great commandments upon which all the law and the prophets depend. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart... and thy neighbour as thyself" (Mt. 22, 37-40)? Moreover, when it is remembered that there were both Jews and Christians present in Arabia at the time of Muhammad, the question can legitimately be raised as to why the Meccan prophet did not throw in his lot with either of these two groups. The question allows of no simple answer - and any attempt to give one must take into account the mysterious ways of divine providence (cf. Rom. 11, 33-36) - but perhaps it can be suggested with Kenneth Cragg that Islam "grew out of Judaism and Christianity because it could not grow with them or into them" (3). In other words, Muhammad expected to gain a sympathetic hearing and encouragement from Jews and Christians. Instead he came up against a Judaism closed in on itself and a Christianity weakened by doctrinal divisions. So an old message developed into a new religion.

GOD

CREATOR - The first element of the message of Islam is that God is the Creator. "Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created" (Q. 96, 1). The Qur'an is full of praise for the "lord of all Being" (Q. 1, 2), the "Lord Most High who created and shaped" (Q. 87, 1-2). Particular attention is given to the origin of man moulded by God out of clay and then infused with God's own Spirit (Q. 15, 26-29). There is a great awareness too of natural phenomena, the stars in the heavens which guide the traveller, the shifting sands of the desert, the rainbearing clouds, the vegetation which can spring up so rapidly in an apparently dead land. All these are signs of God's wisdom and might, and above all of his mercy.

Active, immanent in his creatures. The Creator is in no way a deus otiosus. On the contrary "every day He is upon some labour" (Q. 55, 29). He does not create and then forget what he has done. Creation is not a game. Rather God is the Merciful one, a GOD of bounty, who takes care of his creatures. Even more fundamentally, He is the Living One, the Subsistent Being, who sustains his creation and keeps it in existence. Without Him all things would fade away, would return to nothingness. So God can be said to be present in the midst of his creation: "To God belong the East and the West, whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God" (Q. 2, 115).

Unique - It is not stated explicitly at first, but it soon becomes abundantly clear, that this Creator-God must be unique. He can have no partners. "What, cries the Qur'an, do they associate that which creates nothing and themselves are created? (Q. 7, 191). Thus, consequent upon the idea of creation, comes the fundamental assertion of Islam and the first part of the profession of faith, namely, that there is no divinity except God. The greatest sin

(3) K. Cragg, The Event of the Qur'an, London, George Allen and Unwin 1971, p. 63.

therefore, is that of shirk, giving God a partner or associating something with Him. Furthermore, God is unique not only in the sense that He is alone, but also in that "Like Him there is naught" (Q. 42, 11). There can be no resemblance between God and His creatures. Although He is near to them, present in their midst, yet He is at the same time far away and above them. He is, as the Qur'an repeats unceasingly, God the Most High, the Exalted, the Magnificent.

It may seem that this point is being laboured, for there is nothing new here. But that precisely is the point. It is most important to realize that the fundamental teaching of Islam lies firmly within the Judeo-Christian tradition. The verses of the Qur'an, some of which have just been quoted, should awaken echoes of our own Scriptures. We could call to mind the invitation addressed to Israel: "Listen, Israel, there is no Lord, but the Lord our God" (Dt. 6, 4); or the polemic of the prophets and psalmist against false gods and idols "Which have eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear" (Ps. 115, 5-6); or the affirmation of St Paul: "There is one God, and there can be no other" (1 Cor. 8, 4). We too must believe that "All is God's doing; all living things that breathe, all the spirits of all mankind, lie in the hollow of His hand" (Job 12, 10), for it is "in Him that we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17, 28). Such texts, and many others, show that Islam and Christianity belong to the same conceptual world, very different from that of religions which consider creation to be the work of a multitude of Gods or for which created being is merely an illusion.

Consequences - It should not be thought that this doctrine of the unique Creator is so common-place that it can lightly be assumed and easily passed over. On the contrary, its consequences are far-reaching and immensely practical. The text of Deuteronomy referred to above continues with the injunction: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, thy whole soul and thy whole strength" (Dt. 6, 5) and this commandment is repeated by Christ (Mk. 12, 30). In trying to fulfil this commandment Christians could benefit by the teaching of Muslim authors who insist on "pure devotion" to the one God. This means that not only should one avoid the worship of "idols" such as wealth, comfort and power, but also that care must be taken to purify one's motives in worship. There must be no element of self-seeking, of ostentation or of the desire for material advantage, otherwise one is associating something with God and falling into the grievous sin of shirk.

Islamic theology - Islam is the most radical of all the monotheistic religions. It considers the main task of theology to be to declare and to defend the unity and uniqueness of God. This is why Muslims often refer to theology as tawhid, "establishing or declaring unity". This leads to a stress on divine transcendence to the disadvantage of other aspects, the net result being a certain agnosticism. The existence of God can be known, and his activity discerned, but man can have no inkling of the divine nature, of God's own life.

Islamic theology is thus essentially negative in its approach, aiming to avoid all anthropomorphisms. This explains the intransigent opposition to the application to God of the concept of generation. Muhammad's contemporaries had some idea of the supreme God, but they included in their pantheon goddesses who would seem to have been considered God's daughters. The Qur'an emphatically denies this and declares uncompromisingly:

"Say : He is God, ... who has not begotten and has not been begotten" (Q. 112, 1-3). Generation is conceived of as a physical reality totally unworthy of God, and indeed totally unnecessary. God is eternal, without beginning, so He cannot have been originated. He is everlasting, so He has no need to prolong his existence through his descendents. Hence the rejection of the name Father as applied to God. Hence also the refusal to admit Christ as the Son of God.

Denial of the Trinity - it is within this context that one must understand the Islamic denial of the Trinity. The Qur'an refers to a Triad of God, Jesus and Mary, and rightly rejects this (Q. 5, 116). But it also appeals to Christians: "Believe in God and his Messenger and say not "Three". Refrain; better is it for you. God is only one God. Glory be to him _ that He should have a son!" (4, 171). Thus if occasion arises for Christians to talk with Muslims about the Trinity, care must be taken to make it clear that the language of generation is used analogically.

To conclude this section on God, it can be said that although Christianity and Islam are as one in their belief in the unity of God they differ fundamentally in their appreciation of the implications of this unity. Christianity conceives of a unity which is compatible with a certain plurality. Islam, though it admits the multiplicity of the Names used for God does not accept plurality in unity as the very mode of God's being.

GOD SPEAKS TO MEN

Christianity and Islam are also at one in giving a preeminent place to divine initiative. Vatican II happily underlines this aspect when it says that Muslims adore God "who speaks to men" (4).

Through creation - It can be said that God speaks to men through creation, for the universe is made up of signs which point to God. Human beings are continually being exhorted to reflect upon these signs and so to rise from them to a knowledge of the Creator. They are reminded, for example, of the goodness of God who has provided that the bee should make honey "in which is healing for men. Surely in that is a sign for a people who reflect" (G. 16, 69). They are reminded of God's constant care: "Have they not regarded the birds, that are subjected (to their Maker) in the air of heaven? Naught holds them but God. Surely in that are signs for a people who believe" (Q. 16, 79). It is interesting to note, in passing, that in this case discernment of the sign seems to presuppose faith. Yet for those who have eyes to see, Creation speaks of God.

Through history - God speaks to men in the events of history also, through revealing his power. For example, he destroyed the people of Pharaoh on account of their sins and enabled Moses and the people of Israel to leave Egypt. Similarly God intervenes so that Muhammad and his followers may overcome their enemies (Q. 8, 5 sq.)

(4) Nostra Aetate, n.3.

Through the prophets - Above all, God communicates with men through the prophets. Within each nation, each people, an Apostle has been raised up to proclaim that God is one and to invite men to worship and obedience. There is here too a sense of history, though of history repeating itself, rather than developing. As the starting point of this history the Qur'an relates a prehistorical, or rather pre-temporal, event in which the whole of mankind recognizes God:

"And when thy Lord took from the children of Admza, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, "Am I not your Lord? They said, yes, we testify" - lest you should say on the Day of the Resurrection, "As for us, we were heedless of this". (Q. 7, 171).

Thus a pact, (mithâq) is made between God and man. It will be the duty of successive prophets to remind men of this primordial pact. In this way, Islam recognizes a series of prophets all bringing the same message:

"We believe in God, and that which has been sent down upon us and sent down on Abraham, Ismael, Isaac and the Tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets, of their Lord; We make no division between any of them, and to Him we surrender"(2, 136).

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that there is no progress whatsoever in revelation. To certain of his prophets God gives a Law. This Law is given for a particular time and can be modified later to suit particular circumstances. Thus Moses is given the Torah, but Jesus comes with the Gospel, confirming the truth of the Torah, and making lawful certain things that before were forbidden (Q. 3,50). Similarly the Qur'an is sent down to confirm the previous Scriptures and bring a new Law (5, 48).

It is worth making some remarks on the list of prophets given in the Qur'an. It includes some non-biblical names, such as Hûd, the Messenger to the 'Ad, and Sâlih, the Messenger to the Thamûd(Q. 26, 124 sq). These were messengers to ancient peoples of Arabia which had already disappeared long before the rise of Islam. The disappearance of these peoples is interpreted as being the result of divine wrath, for they had rejected the message preached to them and had turned upon the messengers.

If there are additions to the list of prophets (and in later Islamic tradition their number is greatly increased, sometimes to the figure of 224,000) there are, on the other hand, omissions which seem surprising to Jews and Christians. There is no mention of the major prophets such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, nor of minor prophets such as Amos or Hosea. Is it, perhaps, that the function of the Old Testament prophets is not only to preach the one God and to call to mind the covenant, but also to interpret God's will for their contemporaries? This historical aspect of the prophet's role would seem largely to be absent from the Qur'an.

Abraham: Where biblical and qur'anic figures coincide, the portraits are nevertheless often rather different. Abraham is a case in point and an important one to discuss since, as the document Nostra Aetate says: "the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself" with him (5).

(5) Nostra Aetate, no. 3.

In the Bible, Abraham is primarily the one who has believed in God's promise and so has become the father of the Chosen People. In the Qur'an Abraham is portrayed as the champion of monotheism, witnessing before his father and the members of his tribe, breaking their idols, and in the face of their unbelief departing from them to another land. If mention of covenant there be, it is in connection with the reestablishment of the Kaba in Mecca as a centre of the true worship of God, for the rebuilding of this sanctuary is attributed to Abraham and Ishmael (Q. 2, 118 sq). Abraham is seen as the model of the true worshipper, the true Muslim, before ever Judaism, Christianity or Islam existed. The person is the same, but the perspective has changed.

Jesus: Similar observations could be made regarding the figure of Jesus. In the Gospels Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, long awaited by the Chosen People and desired by the Nations. He proves this by his words and deeds, not only by his activity as a preacher, law-giver and miracle-worker, but also and especially by the events of his passion, death and resurrection which inaugurate a new era. The theological reflection of St Paul gives corporate and cosmic dimensions to the personality of Christ.

Very little of this is to be found in the Qur'an. Jesus remains firmly within the ranks of the prophets, although it would not be quite accurate to say that he is just one of a series. For certain statements are made about him which are not made about any other prophet, and certain titles are attributed to him alone. His miraculous birth is related; he and his mother Mary are said to be protected from the attacks of Satan; it is told how he is able, with the permission of God, to work many miracles, including raising the dead to life (Q. 3, 35 sq). He is called a Word of God (Q. 3, 39-45); 4, 171) and Spirit from God (Q. 4, 17) but it is difficult to establish the exact meaning of these words. What is certain is that in the understanding of Muslims these terms do not imply any divine reality in Christ. The Qur'an is explicit in stating that Jesus is only the Messenger of God and not his Son (Q. 19, 34-35). Islam sees itself as a "via media" between Judaism which refuses to recognize Jesus as a prophet and Christianity which exaggerates in divinizing him.

Disagreement is also to be found regarding the mission of Jesus and its outcome. Mention has already been made of the preaching aspect of this, the working of miracles, and the bringing of a new law. The enemies tried to kill him. It does not admit that they were successful. It denies the reality of Christ's crucifixion and death and states that Jesus was lifted up to God (Q. 4, 156).

There are two points at stake here. The first is the idea of God's protection for his prophets. In all the Qur'anic stories where Messengers meet with opposition, those who oppose them are punished while the Messenger escapes unscathed. It is held to be inconceivable that God should not have intervened to save his prophet Jesus.

The second point is the immediacy of salvation. Each individual person is to come face to face with God; each soul has to carry its own burden; "no soul laden bears the load of another" (Q. 35, 18). There is then apparently no place for a Mediator, a Redeemer.

These two points will have to be borne in mind when Christians are speaking with Muslims. Care will have to be taken to emphasize that Christ's death is not a defeat. It will also have to be made clear that the redemptive value of Christ's death does not take away personal responsibility.

Yet the question naturally arises how differences are to be explained when the same persons are being referred to. Christians might say that Muslims have insufficient knowledge of the Scriptures, that the Qur'an suffers from an imperfect understanding of its "sources". Muslims would retort that it is the Christians who have falsified their Scriptures and so have fallen into exaggeration and error. Such polemics have been engaged in in the past but have proved entirely sterile. As professor Montgomery Watt has written, and his words have been quoted with approval by a Muslim historian: "If a Christian and a Muslim are merely seeking arguments against one another, they will easily find many; but this will not lead to dialogue" (6) If differences cannot be explained away, they can at least be explored, serenely and sympathetically, so that the importance of apparently contradictory points of view be appreciated.

Muhammad: Before discussing this a word must be said about Muhammad. For Islam recognizes Muhammad as a prophet and indeed as the Seal of the Prophets. This belief is so fundamental to Islam that it forms the second part of the shahâda, the profession of faith. Yet this must be understood correctly. Muslims do not believe in Muhammad as Christians do in Christ. They believe not so much in his person as in his mission which was to receive and preach the Qur'an, the final scriptural revelation. Thus Muslims object to being called Muhammadans, which indicates a relationship with God. From another point of view it has been said, with a certain amount of over simplification, but with some justification, that while Christianity is the religion of a Person, Islam is the religion of a Book.

There are two consequences of this position which have a great bearing on Christian-Muslim dialogue. In the first place, belief in the Qur'an as the definitive Scripture tends to make Muslims uninterested in other Scriptures. This is perhaps too bald a statement, for Qur'anic exegesis has always had recourse to the Bible to explain certain of the more obscure passages. Yet these biblical elements, have always been looked on with a certain suspicion. A recent attempt at a modern interpretation of the Qur'an by an Egyptian writer Mustafa Mahmud was severely criticized because it made considerable use of the Book of Revelation and other parts of Scripture. In general one could say that traditional Muslims are satisfied with the Qur'an as a source of religious truth.

The second consequence concerns the susceptibility of Muslims regarding their Prophet. Muslims insist very strongly on the Qur'anic statement: "We make no division between any one of His Messengers" (2, 285). "We accept Jesus as a prophet, they say, why do Christians not accept Muhammad?"

(6) W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World*, Edinburgh University Press 1969, p. 121; cf. Muhammad Talbi, *Islam et Dialogue*, Tunis, Maison Tunisienne de l'Edition 1972, p. 19.

Any disparaging remarks against the Prophet - and there have been many unjust things written about him in the past - are acutely felt. Such sensitiveness must be taken into account if there is to be any real coming together of Christians and Muslims.

MAN'S RESPONSE TO GOD

God calls to man - So far, attention has been given to God and revelation. It is now time to consider the one to whom revelation is directed. For both Muslims and Christians man is interpellated by God and has to respond. The Christian, in the words of the author of the Imitation, is on the royal highway, the Muslim advances along the "straight path". Both are conscious that they need God's help if they are to keep to the road. The revealed Law is seen as providing landmarks, but for these to be discerned in ever-changing circumstances, God's inner guidance is required. It is perhaps in this constant search for the will of God, and in the continual striving for wholehearted submission (islām) in which lies peace (silm), that Christian and Muslim are most deeply united.

The moral life - The Vatican Council rightly drew attention to this when it stated that Muslims "strive to submit wholeheartedly even to his (God's) inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham... Consequently, they prize the moral life and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting" (7). Prayer and almsgiving are constantly connected in the Qur'an. Recognition of God as Creator and Lord should lead naturally to concern for one's fellowmen. The horizontal and vertical aspects are held firmly together. It is easy to see that such an attitude, which is common to Christians and Muslims, provides a sound basis for collaboration in many fields of common concern. It is also possible to give expression to the sense of fraternity in common submission to God's will by means of prayer (8).

Yet even at the level of man's response there is an important difference between Christianity and Islam which stems from a divergent understanding of man. Here again Islam presents itself as a religion of moderation, avoiding both too great a pessimism and too great an optimism.

On the one hand Islam is more optimistic than Christianity in its view of human nature. Man's weakness is admitted: "Surely he is sinful, very foolish" (Q. 33, 78). He tends to overrate himself: "Surely man waxes insolent, for he thinks himself self-sufficient" (96, 6-7). Yet his nature in itself has not been touched. Man's duty is to live a life of pure devotion in conformity with this nature, and consequent upon the pact made with God in pre-eternity. All is not perfect. Evil exists in the world. Malign powers tempt men, and some fall. The stories of the prophets illustrate not only God's mercy in sending Messengers to each nation, but also man's hardness of heart in refusing to accept their message. Yet sin, from that of Adam onwards, remains personal. There would not appear to be, in Islam, any sense of solidarity in sin. Consequently neither is there any solidarity in salvation. That is why in Islam there is no need for a Redeemer.

(7) Nostra Aetate, no. 3.

(8) On the problems concerning joint prayer by Muslims and Christians, see the introduction to Kenneth Cragg's Anthology Alive to God, London, O.U.P. 1970.

This confidence in the basic uprightness of human nature means that man is to find perfection at the level of his nature. The reward promised in the next world, portrayed mainly in terms of material enjoyment, contains, it is true, certain spiritual elements: an atmosphere of peace and harmony among the inhabitants of Paradise, a sense of mutual satisfaction between God and the just soul. There is one mention in the Qur'an of vision of God: "Faces... radiant, gazing upon their Lord" (Q. 75, 22-23). However this is usually interpreted as referring to a fleeting presence of God who will give the just a little extra joy by visiting them from time to time. It is in no way to be considered as the equivalent of the beatific vision. In this way Islam is less optimistic than Christianity. For man is closed in, as it were, within his own nature. He is not open to transformation by grace so that he can share in the very life of God.

MUSLIM - CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

The exclusion of any real point of contact between God and man, in Islam, results in a quite different understanding of the history of salvation, in its origins, its central events, its unfolding and its consummation. Nevertheless, in both Islam and Christianity, it is the same God who calls man to salvation and the same humanity trying to respond. How then can Muslims and Christians, despite the disparity of vision, endeavour to come closer to one another in loving response to God?

The formulation of this question already indicates the direction in which a reply is to be found. Doctrinal differences exist, but so also does common ground. It is necessary to appreciate both these facts. This requires honesty, openness and common concern.

Honesty - Without honesty there can be no true meeting. Either there will be a mad rush to agree, at the price of sacrificing fundamental points of belief, or there will be complete isolation in preconceived positions. Honesty requires that we face up to each other. It is like a garden fence which divides next-door neighbours yet provides them with a meeting place. It demands knowledge, both accurate and as deep as possible. The half-truth, the rapid generalization, the mania for pigeon-holing, all these are obstacles to genuine understanding. This means that serious study must be made, by Christians of Islam and by Muslims of Christianity. As far as possible this must be pursued from the inside, as it were, by consulting sources rather than secondary material, by listening to Muslims expounding Islam and Christians expounding Christianity. Yet it will remain necessary for certain Christians and Muslims to interpret each other's religion. If only to clarify questions of terminology, and to try to remove ambiguities. It should not be expected that such study will make the difficulties disappear overnight, but at least it will help to eliminate false problems, and to present the real ones in their true light.

Openness - Study and conversation must be conducted with complete openness to God and openness to each other. Dialogue must not become a subtle means of proselytism. If my aim is to win over my partner in the dialogue, then the dialogue is vitiated from the start. But what then, it may be asked, is the point of engaging in dialogue? Are not both Christianity and Islam universal religions in which the apostolate is a duty? There is no intention of denying this. "The possibility of conversion must be accepted as the act of God...

both Christians and Muslims, each members of a missionary-minded tradition, should have a deep longing for the spiritual well-being of each other and a sense of poignancy at our long separation" (9). The important phrase here is spiritual well-being. We are being asked to help each other to grow spiritually by sharing our insights. Perhaps too the manner of sharing is important. It may be less a question of trying to convince the other of the truth of a particular doctrine and much more that of trying to explain the value one perceives in this doctrine. Thus the Christian could be led to confess the importance of the Trinity for his own spiritual life, while the Muslim would do the same for God's unity. Such exchanges would require an atmosphere of great confidence, and should not be lightly undertaken, but they could lead to a much greater awareness of spiritual values. In the words of Professor Talbi, "Apostolate becomes essentially attentive openness to the other person, a never-ending quest for the truth, through a continual deepening and assimilation of the values of faith, in a word, through pure witness" (10).

Common concern - Such openness can and should lead to common concern. Rather than simply to differ and living in splendid isolation, mutual openness will give confidence to recognize that we are walking along the same path. The Christian will be ready to say with the Muslim "guide us in the straight path" and the Muslim with the Christian "Thy will be done". The exchange can be founded on, or prolonged by, common prayer, a prayer for forgiveness for past wrongs and prejudices, a prayer of thanksgiving for the unity already experienced in the never-ending quest for truth", a prayer for enlightenment to know how to live up to this truth. For "the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light" (Jn. 3, 21).

Upon the Moslems, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and allpowerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.

Mostra Actate, no. 3.

(9) John R. Taylor and Muzammil H. Siddiqi, Understanding and Experience of Christian-Muslim Dialogue, in S.J. Samartha (ed), Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1971, p. 65.

(10) Talbi, Islam and Dialogue, p. 23.

TENDENCIES OF MODERN ISLAM - by Fr. J. Kenny OP

The history of Islam has traversed many ups and downs, but Muslim society up to the 18th century had enough vitality to reassure the Muslim community that God had destined it to be his supreme and lasting kingdom on earth. But when Europe, flushed with new learning and the power of the industrial revolution, marched over the decadent Muslim world, many Muslims asked themselves what went wrong with Islamic history, and what could be done about their tragic situation.

- A. Reaction by return to the past.- A common reaction to the decay of any society is to claim that the original conception of the society has been neglected and warped, and that a restoration of the society depends upon a return to its sources and to the practices of early times. Such was the driving idea of the Wahhabi movement in Arabia, which began in the 18th century. Wahhabism rejected philosophical and theological speculation as well as sufic mysticism and the cult of saints and their tombs. Only the Qur'an and the Shari'a law could guide the strict and puritanical Arabian community. This movement was helped by the isolation of Arabia which lasted until the discovery of oil there and the development of mass pilgrim influxes in the post-independent years of Muslim countries.
- B. Alarmed activism.- Al-Afghani (1839-1897) seems to have been the first leader to have assessed the growing western encroachment as an overall threat to the Islamic world. He also realized the tremendous weakness of the Islamic world. His whole life, which was first steeped in sufic mysticism, was dedicated to political activity and intrigue, and to stimulating others to abandon their fatalistic passivity and take history into their own hands. Many movements resulted either directly from al-Afghani's inspiration or from parallel thinking. A general trait of most of them is a nostalgia for the past glory of Islam. Although these movements are many and complicated, we can trace some of the tendencies.
- C. Liberalism.- Islam traditionally looked for a liberating outlook from narrow legalism in philosophy (which was sometimes disguised as theology) and in sufism. The first opened the horizons of the world to Muslims; the second broke restrictions in the soul's pursuit of God. The penetration by the West became a third factor stimulating liberalism in Islam. Liberal efforts to rethink Islam have been of many different varieties, from that which is very secular and heavily dependent on foreign influences to that which is basically Islamic in outlook and principles and only uses more modern techniques to address an ^{audience} faced with contemporary problems. The former secular variety, typified by Taha Husayn, tended to be more brilliant intellectually, while the latter, drawing upon traditional Islamic sources, had more force and appeal. Representative of this tendency was Muhammad Abduh, a disciple of al-Afghani, who tried to update Islamic teaching. Addressing himself to the modern age, he eliminated much outdated and abstruse speculation, but retained the substance of the traditional arguments for Islamic beliefs. Liberalism of either tendency has had a strong impact upon the élite of Muslim countries, who control the major professions and the governments, except, recently, for Libya and Uganda. But religious leaders and the mass of the people have been only slightly affected by it. The reasons for liberalism's lack of success are: first, its novelty and foreignness, secondly, disillusionment with the liberalism and moral prestige of Europe as a result of two world wars, and thirdly, the persuasion that Western liberalism is a tool of European political, economic and cultural imperialism designed to keep the Muslim countries in a position of inferiority and subjection.

D. Nationalism.- Rather than liberal attempts to update Islam, the principal thrust of modern Muslim movements has been toward gaining independence for Muslim territories and strengthening their political position. In pre-independence days nationalistic movements were mainly negative in emphasis, to expel foreign domination. This is still true of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and of the struggle elsewhere to achieve economic independence.

Even though the leaders of the nationalist movements were often liberal or secular in outlook, the movements they engendered stimulated an upsurge of traditional Islamic aspirations among the masses of the people. In fact, nationalistic aspirations became identified with Islamic aspirations to such an extent that a pluralistic or secular basis for the participation of non-Muslims in the nationalist movements was by and large reduced to insignificance. For example, the Lebanese position has been awkward in the Pan-Arab movement, which is distinctly Islamic in tone.

The wider pan-Islamic movement has gained importance in post-independent years. This has been made possible by the diplomatic contacts of the independent states and particularly by the upsurge of the number of pilgrims. However the basic motive behind pan-Islam is the conviction that all Muslims are brothers (cf. Qur'an 49, 19); they form one community ('umma) of which they are citizens before they are citizens of any other polity. The classical theory of a Muslim state, such as described by al-Mawardi and others, envisages a single Muslim state with one ruler, or caliph. Only to the extent that this is impracticable may there be separate administrations. The persistent effort of Muslim countries to unite or federate is the natural effect of Muslim brotherhood as a religious and political reality.

E. Apologetics.- The jihad, or holy war, of the pen has always been esteemed more meritorious than the jihad of the sword. A tremendous effort has been and continues to be made by Muslims in writing about Islam. Instead of elucidating Islam and trying to meet modern religious problems, the bulk of this writing consists of apologetics and propaganda, with the aim of: 1) answering attacks on Islam from rationalists, missionaries or orientalists, which were a phenomenon of glaring evidence in the early part of this century. (with the result that any work by an outsider on Islam is regarded with great suspicion); 2) defending Islam before the educated youth who drift from the practice of their religion or abandon it altogether; 3) counteracting the tendency of Muslims to adopt Western values or structure their society according to foreign non-Islamic models.

Such apologetics have been very successful in keeping many young liberal minded Muslims within the fold even while they pursue a westernized style of life. Nevertheless, such writings will do disservice to Islam in the long run because of its extreme defensiveness and intellectual superficiality. This superficiality is shown in the triumphant scientism used to explain the reasonableness of Islam and to prove that the Qur'an and Muslim culture have understood modern science well in advance of the Western discoveries of recent centuries. It is also shown in the compulsion to glorify and idealize Islamic history, neglecting its shortcomings and ignoring the achievements of non-Muslim societies.....

This kind of writing takes for truth what conforms with and confirms an idealized Islam. Moreover it concentrates on the Islam of the past and the Islam of theory as an object of admiration, applause and reverence, instead of propounding an Islam which is an existential stimulus to revering and striving to serve God.

F. Defensive attitudes.- The type of modern Muslim apologetics described above stems from neurotic reactions to the failure of modern Islam to achieve its aims and

ideals (4). These neurotic reactions are not unique to Islam, but common to many communities and religious struggling in the modern world. One such reaction is an isolationist attitude, which shuns free contact with those outside the community; in a greatly varying degree from place to place social distinctions are marked and differences of belief are emphasized over what could be unifying. Here and there, however, some people are realizing that Islam and Christianity are ultimately on the same side in the spiritual struggles that lie before humanity.

Another neurotic reaction is an inflationary attitude. In Muslim apologetics this is shown in exaggerating the exclusivity of Islamic historical achievements, and in making some dogmatic claims which a modern scholar would find untenable and perhaps even deviational from Islam. One such claim is that the Qur'an is a source of historical knowledge of the early prophets and their times, parallel with and even superior to the usual historical sources.

A third neurotic reaction is a fixational attitude, which resists any change in social norms in the face of the radically different and changing social conditions of our day. For Muslim fundamentalists there can be no question of the authenticity of the hadith traditions which are at the base of the various schools of Islamic law. Even now these traditions are being critically reviewed by some Muslims, but the problem is to preserve a continuity with the original vision of Islam and to adapt this vision to the present age.

(4) See the analysis of W. Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam*, London: Longmans, 1968 chapter 11.

COURSES IN ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

AFRICA:

- Algeria: Le Centre d'Etudes Interdiocésain, 5 Chemin des Glycines, Algiers.
- Egypt: Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales (IDEO), 1 rue Mansa al-Tarabish, Abbasieh, Cairo.
- Kenya: Unit of Research, P.O. Box 230, Nairobi.
- Nigeria: Pierre Benignus Study Centre, P.O. Box 4045 Ibadan.
- Tunisia: Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes (ILBA), 12 rue Jamma El Haoua, Tunis.
- Uganda: Department of Religious Studies, P.O. Box 262, Kampala.

AMERICA:

- Los Angeles University, USA.
- Notre Dame University, USA.
- McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

ASIA:

- Lebanon: L'Université St. Joseph, Beirut, directed by the Jesuits. At the Université St. Joseph is the Institut des Langues Orientales. Near it, in 1971, was founded the Centre d'Etudes pour le Monde Arabe Moderne (CEMAM) which does sociological research in the east. Also belonging to the Université St. Joseph is the Centre Religieux des Etudes Arabes (CREA).
- India: Henry Martin Institute, P.O. Box 153, Hyderabad, A.P. India.

EUROPE:

- Spain: At the Universidad Comillas in Madrid there is a Chair of Arabic, P. Salvador Gómez Nogales, SJ being the present titular. He also directs the Asociacion para la Amistad Islamo-Cristiana (AIC) which concerns itself with cultural relations between the Christian and the Muslim Arab worlds.
- France: Cercle Saint Jean Baptiste, 3 rue de l'Abbaye, Paris 75006.
AMANA (Aide Morale aux Nord-Africains) established and directed by the White Fathers, Peres Blancs, 20 rue du Printemps, 75017 Paris.
- Great Britain: Selly Oak Missionary College, Selly Oak, near Birmingham, Warwickshire, England. It groups together several Protestant missionary intitutes for the theological and pastoral training of their members.
- Italy: The Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi, Pzza. S. Apollinare 49, 00186 Roma, is is international. It meets tie Church's need of a centre of Arabic studies and of Islamic culture in Rome itself.

RECENT CONTACTS BETWEEN THE HOLY SEE AND THE ISLAMIC STATES

It was announced recently that the President of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, had been received in audience by King Faisal of Saudi-Arabia on April 23rd, and that the King would seek an audience with the Pope on the occasion of his next visit to Rome. The question arises as to whether this involves a change in the Vatican's policy towards Islam. Is the Holy See turning towards the most traditionalist and theocratic form of Islam and away from the more secularist states which follow one on other variety of so-called "Islamic socialism"?

In reply to this question Mgr. Rossano, assistant to Cardinal Pignedoli, stressed that no such interpretation should be placed on the visit to Riyadh. The Vatican had good relations with Moslem countries like Algeria, Tunisia, Bangladesh and Indonesia, states which could hardly be described as traditionalist. Cardinal Pignedoli would be attending a Muslim-Christian meeting in Mali from 17-19 June, and in October he would be going to a similar conference in Damascus. It was true that relations with Egypt and Libya had at times been strained in the recent past but of late these had been improving. The same was true of relations with Pakistan.

Mgr. Rossano did not feel free to reveal the contents of Pope Paul's message to the Arabian monarch. The Cardinal and the King had reached substantial agreement on several points, while on others each side had merely stated its position. It would be legitimate to infer that the question of Jerusalem had been discussed. The Vatican position was that the Holy Places i.e. those sacred to Muslims, Jews and Christians, should be placed under international control and that the religious rights of all groups should be guaranteed. This was not, of course, the attitude of the Saudi government which wished to see the Old City returned to Arab rule. Israel for her part wanted to retain control of the whole of Jerusalem. Was the Holy See's policy unrealistic then? Mgr. Rossano did not think so. It was a practical solution to a thorny problem and there were even those in Israel who saw merit in it.

Dialogue with the Saudi (Wahhabi) form of Islam had its difficulties, as it did not recognize any clear distinction between the political and religious spheres of life. But differences of viewpoint must not discourage us from engaging in frank dialogue. Islam as a great monotheistic faith is a powerful force which holds together peoples of many races and diverse--even opposing--social systems. It naturally suffers strains and stresses--as does Christianity--but the Holy See has no wish to exploit these. On the contrary it is anxious for cordial relations with Islam in all its manifestations.

NEWS FROM AND FOR THE GENERALATES

1. "ANALISI DELL'ORDINE DEI FRATI MINORI CAPPUCCINI", by R. Carli, F. Crespi, G. Pavan (ETAS KOMPASS LIBRI, serie UOMO E SOCIETA', 9) 1974; pp. 348.

Here we have a thorough social-psychological study of the Capuchin Order, based on the replies to 88 questionnaires and additional information, drawn up by experts for the average reader. A searching and detailed analysis of each of the 11 language or geographical areas of the Order, is followed by an assessment of the replies on all relevant aspects and activities of the Capuchins, revealing general agreement on main points, as well as deficiencies or disagreements on others, with a constant eye to the future. The value of the study, as one can easily perceive, lies mainly on its exhaustive enquiry and detailed evaluation of replies, and perhaps even more in the publication in full of all the questionnaires, which may prove a godsend for any other Institute attempting a thorough self-examination.

2. Cinq sessions Internationales d'Etude Théologique - CENTRE ST DOMINIQUE "UNIVERSITE - D'ETE - 1974 - LA TOURETTE - EVEUX 69210 - L'ARBRESLE - FRANCE".

- 1) 19-26 Juillet: Mariage et sexualité dans la nouvelle culture
- 2) 28 Juillet 4 Août: Comment lire le Nouveau Testament
- 3) 6-13 Août: Le Saint-Esprit, cet inconnu
- 4) 15-22 Août: Eglise, lutte des classes et violence
- 5) 24-31 Août: Vie spirituelle aujourd'hui.

3. Une jeune fille Française, ex-Secrétaire-Sténo-Dactylo de l'Institut de Pédagogie des FSC à Paris, ayant quelque connaissance de la langue Anglaise cherche un emploi à Rome. Prière de téléphoner au Frère Aloysius Carmody, Tél.: n° 620101.

DOCUMENT D'INTERET SPECIAL

Le Frère Dominique SAMNE, FSC de la Haute-Volta nous offre une étude faite sur :

LA PAUVRETE RELIGIEUSE EN CONTEXTE DE SOUS-DEVELOPPEMENT

Après une étude approfondie des conditions et de l'esprit avec lequel Saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle a fondé l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, l'auteur examine comment cet esprit peut s'adapter à la pauvreté africaine. Même, si tous ne pourront admettre ses conclusions, il est très intéressant qu'une telle étude ait été entreprise et conduite à fond par un Africain. Nous citons ci-dessous deux passages qui clarifieront mieux la pensée de l'auteur.

"Le religieux voltaïque, la plupart du temps lors de son entrée au noviciat n'a rien à quoi renoncer. Au contraire il acquiert et jouit des biens de la congrégation qui l'accueille. Que veut dire pour lui le "Va, vends tout ce que tu possèdes, puis viens et suis-moi?"

Ici tout semble s'inverser: le religieux ne renonce-t-il pas à la pauvreté pour entrer dans la richesse en se faisant religieux? Notre situation n'est-elle pas troublante dans la mesure où la pauvreté - qui paraît si centrale dans la vie religieuse, tellement importante qu'elle a été décisive dans la naissance des grands ordres et instituts - est purement et simplement inexistante? Au lieu d'être un choix délibéré de la part du religieux, n'est-elle pas l'objet d'une fuite? On fuit la pauvreté vers la richesse. Quelle pauvreté vit un garçon d'une famille ordinaire de broussards qui entre au noviciat où il mange trois fois par jour, où il peut se promener en voiture, où il dispose d'un confort qu'il n'avait pas ou qu'il n'aurait pas pu avoir chez lui? Pourtant on continue de lui dire qu'il a renoncé au monde, à la richesse, pour s'appauvrir volontairement au nom du Christ."

"Notre pauvreté religieuse pourra-t-elle vraiment être un service des pauvres si nous vivons en tout comme le broussard moyen? Celui-ci n'a pas les moyens matériels pour sortir de sa misère. Nous ne pouvons pas refuser de rechercher ces moyens sous prétexte de vivre pauvres. Le broussard moyen manque souvent d'un certain "savoir" et par là il se laisse tromper sinon exploiter. Nous avons peut-être ce savoir et nous devons nous faire un devoir de l'acquérir, pour servir ceux qui ne l'ont pas. La vie religieuse a trop pâti de cette fausse conception de la pauvreté qui néglige la culture intellectuelle (ou simplement le développement de ses talents) dans le passé, pour que nous consentions à retomber dans les mêmes erreurs. La pauvreté religieuse ne peut pas justifier un sous-développement culturel."

LISTS OF BOOKS RECEIVED DURING FEBRUARY, MARCH and APRIL - compiled by Sr. Agnetta SSPS

I. INTERNAL BOOKS

<u>Code No.</u>	<u>Institute</u>	<u>Title of Book</u> (No. of pages in brackets)
3.75	IMC	Annuario 1973. (256)
3.76	SVD	P. Arnolfo Janssen, by H. Hümmler. (162)
3.77		Temi di spiritualità missionaria dall'epistolario di Daniele Comboni, Parte Prima. (213)
3.78	OMI	Théologie Missionnaire: Théologie de l'implantation ecclésiastique, by André Seumois. (230)
3.79	SM	Tableau du Personnel et des Etablissements, 1973-1974. (129)
3.80	SCMM-T	Register of Professed Sisters, Aspirant Sisters, Novices and Postulants of the Congregation of SCMM, 1973-1974. (132)
3.81	SX	Notiziario Saveriano 1973. (324)
3.82	FSCJ	Missionari Comboniani 1974. (210)
3.83.	ICM	Directory 1974. (107)

II. EXTERNAL BOOKS

<u>Code No.</u>	<u>Organization/Author</u>	<u>Title of Book</u> (No. of pages in brackets)
6.365	Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, India	Fire is Easy: The Tribal Christian and his Traditional Culture, by Barbara M. Boal. (309)
6.366	National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Center, India	Post-Vatican Liturgical Renewal in India at all Levels, Vol.II. (515)
6.367	Ibid.	Text for the Office of Readings. (149)
6.368	Ibid.	Members of God's Family. (106)
6.369	Ibid.	Growing Together in Love in God's Family. (120)
6.370	Ibid.	Walking along with Jesus. (110)
6.371	Ibid.	Gathered from all the Nations. (159)
6.372	Almanaque Mondial	Almanaque Mondial 1973. (512)
6.373	Eden Publisher, Hong Kong	Hong Kong Economic, Political and Social Scene, by Edward K.Y. Chen and Rosie F.L. Chan. (150)

<u>Code No.</u>	<u>Organization/Author</u>	<u>Title of Book (No. of pages in brackets)</u>
6.374	Société des Publications Missionnaires, Lyon	Les Oeuvres Pontificales Missionnaires sous le signe de la collegialité apostolique.(373)
6.375	AGRIMISSIC	First International Stewardship Seminar, Rome, October 1-5, 1973. (180)
6.376	Pasquale Casillo	La Morale della Notizia. (313)
6.377	Government Press, Hong Kong	Hong Kong 1971. (337)
6.378	Istituto Geografico de Agostini, Novara	Calendario Atlante de Agostini 1973. (784)
6.379	International Bank for Reconstruction et al.	1973 Annual Meetings of the Boards of G Governors Summary Proceedings. (267)
6.380	MARC, USA	Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas. (645)