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## EDITORIAL

*With our best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, we are able to give you the final issue of SEDOS Bulletin. —*

*Msgr Michael Fitzgerald, M.Afr., shows us in his study that evolving traditions explain the different contemporary views and attitudes to woman. —*

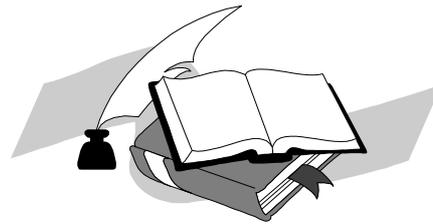
*Archbishop Henri Teissier of Alger, Algeria, has taken the continuous martyrdom of religious in Algeria as the subject for an inspiring meditation on the value of missionary solidarity which witnesses to the new fraternity and equality that are part of the coming of the kingdom. —*

*Fr Jacques Dupuis, SJ, who is well-known for his studies on religions and dialogue, presents in his paper, given at a meeting of the WCC, the different perspectives needed today to understand the mystery and role of Christ. —*

*Fr Walter von Holzen, our Executive Director and editor of the Bulletin, presents an overall view of SEDOS' main activities during the year. He extends a special welcome to the seven new Congregations on behalf of all the members. —*

*The Bulletin ends with a very useful author and subject index of the 320 pages of the current year.*

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***SEDOS Secretariat wishes  
all its readers a Happy  
Christmas and many  
Blessings throughout  
the New Year.***

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# SOME NOTES ON THE ISLAMIC VIEW OF WOMEN

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Michael L. Fitzgerald, M.Afr.

## INTRODUCTION

It is not possible to discuss the issue of women in society according to Islam as if the world of Islam were homogeneous. Islam, just as any other world religion, exhibits cultural differences. An example, simple in nature and even banal, could be the participation of women in trade. Whereas in the souks of North Africa it would be rare to find women among the store-keepers, in Indonesia they appear to be the most active in the market.

It is true that there is a body of Qur'anic teaching on women, and that rules and regulations have been developed by Islamic law. Custom is nevertheless strong and has considerable influence on the way Qur'anic and legal principles are applied. Here an example could be the attitude to the legal impurity of women caused through menstruation. Because of this impurity women, in some parts of the Islamic world, have been totally excluded from the mosque and thus from an important segment of the Islamic way of life. Yet elsewhere a special section of the mosque is provided for women, and they frequent the prayers and the Friday preaching in large numbers.

Since it is not possible to treat all the situations in which Muslim women find themselves, the limitations of a general presentation will have to be recognised. Some of the features of the teaching of the Qur'an as it effects women will be treated first. This will be followed by examples of the development of Islamic law on certain points. Finally some contemporary positions on women in society will be summarily presented.

## 1. QUR'ÂN

### 1.1 Preliminary observation

It is fitting to start with a preliminary observation. The Qur'an is not a systematic work. It is not a credo, though it contains the basic elements of Islamic faith. It is not a code of law, though it

contains ample legislative material. It is not a manual of moral theology, though it pays particular attention to ethical matters. The Qur'an is the record of a message preached over a period of 22 years, from about 610 to the death of Muhammad in 632. It is by its nature fragmentary. Even legislative passages contain decisions which originated from particular situations, solutions for the problems arising in the life of the first Muslim community.

### 1.2 Improvement in the Status of Women

It is commonplace to say that Islam improved the status of women. This would seem to be entirely accurate as regards certain aspects of life.

Infanticide, especially the killing of female offspring, is condemned. "Say: Come, I will recite unto you that which the Lord hath made a sacred duty for you: that ye slay not your children because of penury — We provide for you and for them" (*The Meaning of The Glorious Qur'an*, 6:151; cf. 6:140). Irony is used against the preference of males over females: "And they assign unto Allah daughters — Be He Glorified — and unto themselves what they desire; when if one of them receiveth tidings of the birth of a female, his face remaineth darkened, and he is wroth inwardly. He hideth himself from his folk because of the evil of that whereof he hath tidings, (asking himself): Shall he keep it in contempt, or bury it beneath the dust. Verily evil is their judgement" (16:57-59). In one of the earliest *suras*, announcing God's judgement on the Last Day, the "girl-child that was buried alive" appears as a witness for the prosecution asking "for what sin she was slain" (81:8-9).

Women are allowed to inherit (4:11 and *passim*) although, as will be seen later, inequality between males and females is built into the laws of inheritance.

Women are to be respected, particularly mothers, as can be deduced from the concise injunction: "Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom you

claim (your rights) of one another, and towards the wombs (that bare you)” (4:1).

### 1.3 Basic Equality

“Islam views the woman as a human being like the man without any differences between them except in so far as is dictated by the nature of human structure” (Khayyat, Abdul Aziz, “Women’s Status in Islam”, p. 17). Women are prepared for pregnancy; childbirth, suckling and raising children. They have special duties in this respect. Apart from this there is equality between males and females as regards rights and duties (ibid.).

This equality is based on a common origin. All human beings spring from, “a single soul” (4:1). Everything has its origin in God the Creator. He created male and female (49:13). Sexual difference is thus of divine origin. This fact should lead to the greatest respect with regard to sexual relations and reverence for the womb that bears life.

Men and women are equal in the sight of God. “I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost” (3:195). They will be judged in the same way and will receive the same reward: “And whoso does good works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, such will enter paradise and they will not be wronged the dint in a date-stone” (4:124; cf. 16:17). Another verse shows that they are not to have the same qualities: “Lo! men who surrender unto Allah, and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey ... Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward” (33:35).

### 1.4 Propriety in Relations

Islam is concerned to protect women from unwanted attention. This can be seen in the prescriptions about entering houses: “O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own without first announcing your presence and invoking peace upon the folk thereof ... And if ye find no-one therein, still enter not until permission hath been given” (24:27-28). There is also the obligation of custody of the eyes and of modesty in dress, both for men and women. For men the formulation is quite succinct: “Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Lo! Allah is aware of what they do” (24:30). For women it is more developed: “and tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of

their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms” (24:31). There then follows a list of the people, husbands, near male relatives, women and children, to whom women can show their adornment. A further verse deals with this subject: “O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed” (33:59).

It will be noticed that the Qur’ân itself does not stipulate exactly which parts of the body are to be covered. It is tradition which will lay down that only the face, palms of the hands and feet are to be exposed. It is custom that will establish the idea of *purdah*, or seclusion of women.

In its concern for propriety in relations, the Qur’ân lays down severe punishment for sexual offences. The punishment for adultery or fornication, whether by a man or by a woman, is one hundred stripes (this was later changed to execution by stoning) (24:2). Yet women’s reputation is to be protected. An accusation of sexual misconduct, if not supported by four eye-witnesses, will be considered false and will bring a punishment of eighty stripes on the accuser (24:4). Four witnesses are required on another occasion: “As for those of your women who are guilty of lewdness, call to witness four of you against them. And if they testify (to the truth of the allegation) then confine them to the houses until death take them or until Allah appoint for them a way” (4:15). Since the sin of adultery and fornication is dealt with in 24:2 already referred to, some commentators think that this verse is concerned with lesbian relations. This interpretation could be borne out by the following verse: “And as for the two of you who are guilty thereof, punish them both. And if they repent and improve, then let them be” (4:16). This could refer to two men and thus to homosexual relations.

### 1.5 Marriage

The only place for sexual relations is therefore in marriage. In Islam this is essentially a contract (*nikâh*) established, as with all contracts, before witnesses, at least two men, or one man and two women (cf. 2:282). The Qur’ân states: “But plight not your troth with women except by uttering a recognised form of words. And do not consummate the marriage until (the term) prescribed is run” (2:235).

The dowry is an essential part of the marriage contract: “And give unto the women (whom ye marry) free gift of their marriage portions; but if they of their own accord remit unto you a part thereof, then ye are welcome to absorb it (in your wealth)” (4:4). Here the term used is *saduqât*, which is similar in form to *sadaqa*, free alms-giving. Elsewhere (4:24) the Qur’ân will speak of *ujûr* from *ajr* which means recompense or wage.

What is important to understand here is that the dowry becomes and remains the woman’s property. She has no obligation to use it for the upkeep of the family. There is no communion of goods in Islamic marriage. The husband has to provide for the needs of the family, both for his wife and for his children. The wife can require payment for suckling the children she has borne, or suggest that another woman be hired for this task (cf. 65:6). The man has to provide the house: “Lodge them where you dwell, according to your wealth, and harass them not so as to straiten life for them” (ibid.).

This last verse quoted says “where you dwell”. It is quite possible that the Qur’ân marks a change in contemporary Arab society from uxorilocal to virilocal marriage. It is nevertheless important to notice that if the wife has the right to cohabitation, she also has the obligation of following her husband.

There is a further duty of obedience. The Qur’ân says: “Men are in charge of women” (4:34). Two reasons are given: “because Allah hath made one of them to excel the other” (this is usually taken as referring to physical strength) and “because they spend of their property (for the support of women)” (ibid.). The verse continues: “So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded”. It then goes on to describe how to deal with the disobedient: “As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. The translation “scourge” seems rather strong; “beat” would be more accurate. Yet even this causes surprise, and there are Muslims who express the opinion that this Qur’ânic precept was limited to the time in which it was given, and does not hold good under present conditions where relations between husband and wife are much closer.

Moreover the Qur’ân does give a better idea of matrimonial relations. Men are not to inherit women (i.e. the wives of deceased kinsmen) against their will, they are not to deprive them of their dower, but are to treat them with kindness (*ma’rûf*, which means acceptable behaviour according to custom) (cf. 4:19).

There is a certain mutuality: “They (your wives) are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them” (2:187). This is according to the will of God, for the Qur’ân says: “And of His signs is this: He created for you helpmeets from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy” (30:21).

## 1.6 Impediments to Marriage

The Qur’ân lists various impediments such as consanguinity and affinity (4:23). It may be noted that while a man is not allowed to marry his paternal or maternal aunt, marriage with the aunt’s daughter is not prohibited. Marriage between cousins has always been highly prized in Arab society.

A further impediment exists, that of religion: “Wed not idolatresses (*al-mushrikât*) till they believe” (2:221). It is permitted for a man to marry “virtuous women of those who received the Scripture before you” (5:5), that is the People of the Book, Jews and Christians. It is not, however, permissible for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim. The reasoning behind this is simple: the offspring follow the father; if he is not a Muslim neither will his children be brought up as Muslims, and this would be a loss for the *umma*, the Muslim community.

## 1.7 Polygamy

The Qur’ân contains a verse which allows the possibility of polygamy. It is useful to quote this verse in its context:

*Give unto orphans their wealth. Exchange not the good for the bad (in your management thereof) nor absorb their wealth into your own wealth. Lo! that would be a great sin. And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that you will not do injustice (4:2-3).*

It can be remarked first that what is allowed is polygamy, for a man to take several wives. Polyandry, for a woman to have several husbands at the same time, is not allowed. The reason for this is that the paternity of eventual children would be uncertain.

The immediate reason for the permission is the situation of the small Muslim community which has been engaged in wars. The men have fallen in battle and numerous women and children remain. Who will look after them? The permission is granted to take more than one wife in order to provide for those who are in need.

It should further be observed that there are certain conditions. Concubines are allowed. In a society in which slavery was practised, the master could have sexual relations with his female slaves. Legitimate wives, however, were limited to four on condition of treating them justly. Later legislation will determine what this means as regards lodging, sustenance and the observance of conjugal rights. But the Qur'ân says elsewhere: "Ye will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however, much ye wish (to do so)" (4:129). Some Muslims see here a Qur'anic recommendation towards monogamy, arguing that equal treatment not only in material affairs but also in affection is impossible. Others prefer to hold to the text of the Qur'ân, allowing the possibility of up to four wives.

## 1.8 Divorce

The ideal of good matrimonial relations does not always hold. Instead of love and compassion there can develop misunderstanding and antipathy. Islam, which holds as a principle that "Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you" (2:185), admits divorce. However before any decision is taken an attempt to bring about reconciliation must be made: "and if you fear a breach between them twain (the man and wife), appoint an arbiter from his folk and an arbiter from her folk. If they desire amendment Allah will make them of one mind" (4:35). This verse demonstrates that marriage does not concern the couple only, but involves also their respective families.

The Qur'ân goes into considerable detail on the question of repudiation (*talâq*) (2:226-232). This is the man's prerogative. Repudiation can be revoked twice but becomes definitive if pronounced a third time. It does not however become immediately effective. The Qur'ân lays down a waiting-period (*'idda*) of four months, or more exactly of three menstrual periods. The reason for this is twofold: first to provide a time for possible reconciliation and secondly to see whether the woman is pregnant in which case the husband will still be responsible for the child. Here it could be said that the primary concern of the Qur'ân is the welfare of the child and

not that of the woman. After the waiting-period the woman's right to maintenance ceases. There is no alimony in the Islamic conception of divorce.

In the above-mentioned passage there is mention of another type of procedure for divorce, known as *khul'*. "And if ye fear that they may not be able to keep the limits of Allah, in that case it is no sin for either of them if the woman ransoms herself" (2:229). In other words the woman can take the initiative to bring about a divorce by mutual consent, offering some financial compensation, for example to restore the dowry that has been paid.

## 1.9 Marriage for a Determined Period

A verse on marriage has given rise to a practice which the *Shi'a* have retained. "Lawful unto you are all beyond those mentioned, so that you seek them with your wealth in honest wedlock, not debauchery. And those of whom ye seek content (*istamtatûm*) (by marrying them), give unto them their portions as a duty" (4:24). The *Shi'a* base themselves on this verse to uphold what is known as "*mut'a* marriage", or marriage of enjoyment, which is a marriage contract for a stipulated period (one day, one month, one year ... ninety-nine years). It could at first sight seem to be a form of legalised prostitution. It is said that the permission granted for this type of marriage by the Qur'ân was revoked by the Caliph 'Umar. The *Shi'a*, opposed to 'Umar, have not accepted this ruling and maintain the possibility of this form of marriage, considering it even a special source of blessing.

## 1.10 Discrimination against Women

Though as believers women and men are equal, nevertheless there are certain legal dispositions which discriminate against women. These lie in the law of inheritance and in that of witness.

As has been mentioned above, it would seem that Islam did bring in an innovation in allowing women to inherit. Nevertheless the Qur'ân states clearly "to the male the equivalent of the portion of two females" (4:11; 4:176). This is applied throughout the whole system of inheritance. The reason for the difference is, as has been explained, that women do not bear financial responsibility for the family.

In the context of drawing up a bill of credit, it is said: "And call to witness, from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not (at hand) then

a man and two women, as such as ye approve as witnesses, so that if the one erreth (through forgetfulness) the other will remember” (2:282). This would seem to be disparaging to women. A contemporary Muslim explains that “this right was jointly given to two women so that each of them may remind the other concerning the event or the case they are giving evidence about especially in crimes like murder and criminal attack, because women are usually more sentimental and easily moved than men, and therefore they must give joint evidence” (Khayyat, p. 24). The same author does attempt to give a more positive interpretation: “The one woman evidence or testimony is accepted in matters related to women like testimony on birth, descent, suckling, etc. It is an honour accorded to the woman that she is not exposed to what man is made to confront in transaction, sales, debts and other dealings leading to law courts and appearing before the judge and being cross examined by plaintiffs, attorneys and others. Thus woman’s testimony is required only in cases of urgency” (p. 25).

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITION

### 2.1 General Remarks

The Qur’ân is only the first of the “roots” (*usûl*) of Islamic jurisprudence. The others are Tradition (*sunna*), analogical reasoning (*qiyâs*) and consensus (*ijmâc*). On these bases Islamic law has been developed according to four schools, the Mâlikî, the Hanafî, the Hanbalî. To these could be added the Ja’farî school, which is that of the Twelver Shi’ites who form the majority of the Shi’a.

It will not be possible to give in full detail the situation of women according to these schools, though some references will be made to their teaching, as also to modern codes of personal status of certain majority Muslim countries (cf. Hinchcliffe, D.) It can be stated generally that tradition has tended to harden male domination, whereas the modern codes attempt to redress the situation in favour of women.

### 2.2 The Marriage Contract

Women of the Mâlikî, Hanbalî and Shâfi’î schools do not have the capacity to contract their own marriages. This will always be done for them by a guardian (*wâlî*). A Hanafî woman can contract her own marriage, but her guardian may attack the

contract if he considers that the chosen partner is not her equal.

The Hanabî school allows stipulations to be inserted into the contract. This possibility can be used to allow the woman greater freedom. The contract could, for instance, stipulate that the husband must allow his wife to continue working outside the home if she so wishes.

The first right of the woman, and an essential part of the contract, is the dower. This is usually divided into two parts: the “prompt” dower, which is payable as soon as the contract is agreed, and the “deferred” dower, which will become payable on the termination of the marriage, either by death or divorce. This device is used as a safeguard for the women against the man’s capricious use of his right to repudiate her.

With regard to impediments to marriage mention could be made of the impediment of mixed religion. Modern codes, for example those of Morocco and Iraq, have maintained this. The Tunisian code states that neither of the future partners must be under an impediment “according to the law”. This in itself could refer to the code of law which does not mention religion in this respect. However jurisprudence has interpreted it as referring to “religious law” (*shari’a*), and so the impediment of mixed religion remains, in particular for the woman who cannot marry a non-Muslim. This has its consequence when a Muslim woman, residing in a non-Muslim country but a citizen of a Muslim majority country, wishes to marry a non-Muslim. Often the authorities of her country of origin will not deliver a certificate of freedom unless the future husband becomes a Muslim.

### 2.3 Married Life

The wife has the right to maintenance as long as the marriage exists. This right, which extends to food, clothing and reasonable accommodation, but not to medical expenses, holds good even if the woman is capable of maintaining herself. She, on her part, has no obligation to contribute to the maintenance of her husband even if he is in need. This duty devolves upon his children or his near relatives.

The counterpart to maintenance is obedience. On the one hand, the husband can require his wife to accompany him when he travels. On the other hand, he has the right to forbid her to leave his house, even for the seemingly innocent purpose of visiting

friends. If the wife is disobedient he has the right to suspend her maintenance. The law gives him the right to inflict physical punishment on her, provided he does not cause her serious injury. In such situations the wife has little possibility of seeking redress.

## 2.4 Polygamy

The husband has the right to take additional wives, as long as the number of four wives at any one time is not surpassed. According to Shī'a law, the man can also contract *muf'a* marriages. In traditional law the husband is not required to obtain permission from his first wife before taking another.

Here again the Hanbalī system of stipulation can work in favour of the first wife. She can have inserted into the marriage contract that if her husband takes another wife she will have the right to seek divorce.

It is probable that modern conditions of life, not only economic but also with regard to the expectations concerning married life, have reduced the incidence of polygamy. It is certainly true that the modern codes have brought in more stringent conditions. The Moroccan code requires that the second wife must know that her future husband is already married. It also allows the first wife to add a stipulation that her husband should not take a second wife. The Iraqi code makes a judicial intervention necessary. It is the judge who will ascertain whether the husband is capable of treating his wives equally. The Tunisian code goes even further, making polygamy a punishable offence.

## 2.5 Divorce

It is in matters of divorce that male domination becomes most apparent. Although repudiation is considered to be "the legitimate act most abhorrent in the eyes of God", it is nevertheless supported as a man's right. The husband may repudiate his wife at will, with no real reason. Traditionally a repudiation pronounced in jest or in an intoxicated state will be held to be valid.

Here again the modern codes have intervened to curb what has perhaps been a cause of greater distress to women than polygamy, since it has put them in a very precarious situation. For instance, the Moroccan code considers without legal effect any repudiation pronounced in a state of intoxication or anger or under duress. The Tunisian code has simply

taken away from the man the unilateral right of repudiation. Only the judge can pronounce a divorce.

Women have no right corresponding to that of their husbands. Some of the schools do allow the wife to appeal for a divorce on the grounds of ill treatment. She also has the possibility of offering compensation in exchange for her freedom. In the Hanafī school the only grounds on which a woman can apply to the courts for a dissolution is the incapacity of her husband to consummate the marriage.

## 2.6 Guardianship of Children

The divorced woman retains custody of her children only for a limited period of time. The period differs according to the schools, from a minimum of two years (end of weaning) to the whole time of childhood until the age of puberty. Even during this period the child's legal guardian, the father or the nearest male relative, has the right not only to control the child's education but also to contract marriage for the infant without the mother's consent.

The question of guardianship can become dramatic in the cases of mixed marriages which end in divorce. The wife, the non-Muslim partner, may well see her children taken away from her or prevented from coming to visit her.

# 3. CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF WOMEN

## 3.1 A Traditional View

In a colloquium on "Women in Society" organised jointly by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilisation Research, Amman, the paper on women's status in Islam was given by Dr Abdul Aziz Khayyat, a religious scholar and former minister in the Jordanian Government. In the second part of his paper he listed the "aspects of reverence" which Islam has accorded to women.

First of all he pointed out that, according to Islam, it was not the woman who urged Adam to eat that forbidden fruit. Thus woman is not under any curse and should not be stigmatised. He then presented the lack of financial responsibility of the wife for her children as a recognition of her role in the home. It is an honour for women to have men as their protectors. Dr Khayyat's position on evidence and

on inheritance has already been referred to. The possibility of polygamy, in case of need such as the sterility or illness of the first wife, is also seen as an honour for women. It is, in his opinion, more dignified for a woman to be a second wife than to be a mistress who can be cast off at any time. The financial independence of the wife is a further proof of the dignity Islam confers upon her. Divorce, he pointed out, is “essentially forbidden and should not be resorted to except where it is necessary”. He quoted a *hadith* from Muhammad: “Marry and divorce not; for God does not love men and women who quickly get bored of their spouses and wish to try others”. Yet permission for the woman to seek divorce is considered another feature of her dignity. The veil too is an aspect of woman’s dignity, since it helps to enhance her modesty and chastity. Finally Dr Khayyat referred to the woman’s right to choose her husband, though she should secure her guardian’s approval (Khayyat, pp. 23-28).

It must be recorded that Dr Khayyat’s presentation, which could be called an apologetic for the traditional attitude towards women in society, did not meet with unconditional approval from all the Muslim women present at the colloquium. There are today feminist currents in Islam to which we must now turn (cf. Sr Lucie Pruvost, MSOLA, SEDOS, 11 March 1993). There are two main lines of thought, fundamentalist and modernist. They both have the same starting point, the degraded situation of the Muslim woman which has deleterious consequences for society as a whole. Both are engaged in the transformation of society, but the society they are aiming for and the methods they use are different.

### 3.2 The Fundamentalist Approach

Fundamentalists generally practice a “return to the sources”. This can be done in two ways. Those belonging to the Reformist tradition accept the status of women as it was at the beginning of Islam, since Islam saved women from a disastrous situation. Subordination to men is seen as a value to be kept, for women are different in nature. They are therefore less fit for certain professions, such as judge, but more suited to activities of a social nature. The freedom for women to go and come as they wish, without male supervision, is rejected, as is co-education. The veil is often a symbol of this tendency, marking this return to the sources.

### 3.3 The Modernist Approach

The Modernists also wish to return to the sources, but they interpret them in a different way. Usually

more familiar with Western thought, and with feminist movements in the West, they tend to re-read the sources with the help of modern literary criticism. For example Riffat Hassan, a Pakistani now teaching in the U.S.A., has been engaged in a feminist reading of the Qur’ân. Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan, has been studying the *hadith* literature to show how misogynist traditions had been invented.

Access to the world of work is what they are advocating primarily, fully conscious that in opposing male predominance they will be accused of subverting society. In the already mentioned Christian-Muslim colloquium on “Women in Society”, both Muslim women speakers emphasised the active role of women in society. Dr Omaymah Dahhan, an economist, attributed the lack of participation of women in the work force in the Arab world to early marriage and to low levels of education. It is obvious that these two are connected, for studies are often interrupted on account of marriage. Dr Dahhan therefore recommended that the levels of women’s education and skills be raised, that facilities be developed to remove obstacles preventing women from combining their economic and family role (day-care centres, nurseries), but also that women should be supported and encouraged to participate in positions of authority, including political participation (Dahhan, pp. 71-93, especially 92-93).

Dr Samira Khawaldeh, principal of a private Islamic school, underlined the permanent principles of Islam which lay the foundations for women’s activity in society. There is the role of faith as a source of mental health. “By believing in the values of Islam woman can render herself, future generations, and mankind the greatest service” (Khawaldeh, “Future Opportunities and Prospects for Women in Islam”, p. 102). There is the basic equality between man and woman, from which follows woman’s enjoyment of full civil rights; yet the distinct nature of woman, both physical and psychological, without this interfering with the principle of equality. Dr Khawaldeh takes exception to those Muslims who, in order to prevent sin and social problems, would deprive women of the opportunity to interact in society. One expression of this would be imposing the veil and stopping Muslim girls from attending mixed universities. She sums up her paper on the future of women in society by listing the opportunities Islam offers them (*ibid.*, pp. 97-106, especially p. 106):

1. *To be equal to man as a human being;*
2. *To have full rights as wife and mother;*

3. *To be politically active;*
4. *To be economically independent;*
5. *To run her own life and make her own decisions;*
6. *To participate effectively in public life;*
7. *To be morally immune against contemporary corruption and permissiveness;*
8. *And above all, to have mental stability and spiritual peace.*

## CONCLUSION

In concluding this short paper on Islamic views of women it is necessary to emphasise again the fragmentary nature of this study. It is to be considered more in the nature of sounding than of a complete description of the situation of women. It may yet have been sufficient to allow some understanding of this situation and to show that a fertile field lies open for co-operation between Christians and Muslims. In this respect it may be useful to end with a summary of the conclusions of the colloquium on "Women in Society according to Islam and Christianity".

1. Both religions, Islam and Christianity, believe in God's creation as the foundation for the dignity of human nature in which man and woman share equally. Yet they recognise the differences between men and women as God-given.
2. The importance of the family is stressed. The responsibility of both parents remains the basis for the development and stability of a healthy family. The particular role of the woman in the family is considered vital, but it is recognised that she can have an influence in the educational, social and economic fields. This extra dimension of her role is not always sufficiently appreciated and supported.
3. Thus the role of the woman in the family and her work at home is considered essential, but full recognition is given to her right to engage in other activities according to capabilities and circumstances, and in accordance with the principles of each religion.
4. It is recognised that misguided practices exist which undermine woman's dignity and her potential. These are the product of social traditions. Constant effort is required to correct them.
5. Concern was expressed about the exploitation of women which violates their dignity.

6. There are shortcomings in legislation concerning such matters as terms of employment, remuneration, training, maternity leave. Christians and Muslims should work together to improve legislation.

7. There is a need to increase awareness of religious values in order to help to guarantee women's dignity and to help women fulfil their role in society.

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# EN ALGERIE

## VIVRE LES BÉATITUDES

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Il nous a semblé qu'il était difficile, voire impossible, à l'heure de l'épreuve, de s'éloigner du peuple auquel Dieu et l'Église nous avaient envoyés. Dans la mesure où, par la grâce de Dieu, nous pouvions vivre avec suffisamment de sérénité les épreuves de la communauté et les menaces quotidiennes sur notre vie, nous avons donc cherché à offrir à nos amis et partenaires algériens ce signe de fidélité qui est inscrit dans notre présence au milieu d'eux en ces temps de violence et de souffrances.

### 1. MOTIVATIONS POUR UN TEMPS D'ÉPREUVE

#### 1. Vivre et prouver notre fidélité au peuple auquel Dieu et l'Église nous ont envoyés

Il s'agit là d'une fidélité personnelle, comme hommes et comme chrétiens, pour ceux qui pouvaient l'assumer.

Mais il s'agit aussi de notre fidélité communautaire comme Église d'Algérie. L'Église en Algérie, particulièrement depuis l'indépendance, a voulu être non pas seulement la communauté du culte des chrétiens, mais l'Église du peuple algérien, dont, par ailleurs, l'identité nationale est musulmane. Notre fidélité, en ces moments difficiles, voudrait prouver que nous sommes bien l'Église en Algérie. C'est cette conviction qui s'exprime de diverses manières dans les citations suivantes reprises de la vie de nos communautés.

*“Le Seigneur a fait à notre Église, prise dans son ensemble, la grâce de la fidélité. Certes, il a fallu surmonter doutes et peurs, parfois même angoisses. Chacun l'a fait selon son tempérament, sa vocation propre, mais avec courage. L'Église comme corps s'est montrée fidèle dans sa solidarité avec le peuple algérien”.*

A travers cette fidélité, nous voulons exprimer et mettre en oeuvre notre vocation à faire partie, comme Église, de l'histoire du peuple, dans les épreuves comme dans les temps faciles.

*“Cette notion d'histoire commune me paraît primordiale. C'est une des redécouvertes du Concile que nous avons mise en oeuvre sans trop le savoir. C'est dans cette histoire commune que se joue la mission de l'Église; elle est la face concrète de la réalité de l'Alliance; elle est un des moyens par lesquels l'Église signifie le don qu'elle a reçu et dont elle est redevable aux autres”...*

#### 2. Vivre dans la crise l'approfondissement de nos relations avec nos partenaires musulmans

L'un des motifs déterminants de notre présence en Algérie, c'est la possibilité de vivre une relation humaine et spirituelle avec des partenaires musulmans. A travers nos rencontres, c'est, pensons-nous, l'Église et le monde musulman qui communiquent, et parfois même qui communient au nom de Dieu.

La crise a conduit beaucoup d'entre nous à quitter nos lieux habituels de rencontre et de service. Ailleurs, ce sont nos visites et nos relations avec nos amis qui doivent être vécues avec plus de réserve et de discrétion. Des liens sont aussi coupés auxquels il faut suppléer par la correspondance, le téléphone, etc.

Mais la crise a aussi approfondi nos relations avec nos partenaires musulmans, partout où nous avons pu maintenir ces relations. Dans cette crise, en effet, beaucoup se posent des questions fondamentales sur eux-mêmes, sur leur identité culturelle et religieuse, sur l'islam, sur Dieu, sur la place de la femme dans

la société, sur la relation de l'État et de la religion ou sur les liens entre la conscience et la religion. etc.

Le temps de la "persécution" ou de "l'épreuve" est un temps de plus grande vérité dans la rencontre et de plus grande fidélité dans l'échange. C'est là aussi un appel à demeurer fidèle dans cette relation. Sur ce point aussi, on trouvera, ci-dessous, quelques témoignages qui expriment cette conviction:

*"Bien souvent la tendresse de Dieu nous rejoint à travers les gestes délicats de nos amis qui s'expriment de multiples manières, par une visite, un conseil de prudence, une communication téléphonique, un petit achat fait à notre place, un accompagnement, une lettre. Cette amitié prend tout son prix quand elle débouche sur le partage des peines et des joies et la recherche ensemble des fidélités à inventer dans ces heures difficiles. L'ami fidèle n'a pas de prix. C'est un bien inestimable" (Si 6,15)*

*Entre chrétiens ces amitiés font exister notre Église d'une façon très concrète, très forte. Avec nos partenaires algériens, elles font venir le Royaume de Dieu 'qui est la communion de tous les êtres humains entre eux et avec Dieu' (RM 15)...*

*Dans l'épreuve que nous traversons, notre relation avec les Algériens s'approfondit, l'Église acquiert par sa fidélité et sa solidarité avec la souffrance du peuple, comme une nouvelle légitimité. Elle confirme son engagement de l'indépendance ...*

*Dans cette crise cependant vous voyez naître des aspects nouveaux et positifs. L'individu émerge du groupe avec ses opinions, ses choix et son désir de liberté même en matière religieuse, car l'islam est traversé par des courants divers, antagonistes jusqu'à l'anathème et au meurtre. Le pluralisme devient peu à peu un fait de société alors que jusque-là le conformisme primait et faisait de la différence une 'fitna', un acte condamnable. Avec lui, beaucoup refusent de plus en plus l'enfermement dans les frontières et les esprits. On rejette la violence avec plus de détermination car on en mesure mieux les ravages".*

### **3. Prendre notre part des travaux de la réconciliation, de la non-violence et de la paix**

Notre présence est un sujet de discorde, puisque certains la contestent au point d'organiser contre nous des attentats. Ces attaques elles-mêmes contre notre communauté rendent notre présence encore plus manifeste. Nous l'avons bien perçu après l'enlèvement des moines. Cette communauté était seulement connue des chrétiens et de ses voisins à Tibhirine et à Médéa. L'enlèvement des moines et leur exécution l'a fait connaître à toute la société algérienne. Chacun était ainsi conduit à se positionner par rapport à cet enlèvement. Peu nombreux ont été ceux qui ont réagi en s'étonnant que des moines chrétiens aient cherché à vivre parmi des musulmans. La plupart des musulmans algériens sont entrés avec nous dans la prière pour que Dieu préserve leur vie et fléchisse le cœur de leurs ravisseurs. Puis, après l'annonce de leur mort, ils ont vécu avec nous, aussi, la consternation, la condamnation et la honte qu'a suscitées un tel crime.

Dans une société où l'histoire a souvent conduit à faire sentir la présence chrétienne comme un élément étranger d'origine coloniale, les épreuves vécues ensemble obligent beaucoup de personnes à se déterminer sur le fait même de notre droit à la présence. Le désir d'ouverture à l'autre progressant avec le pluralisme, la présence chrétienne est perçue par beaucoup comme un élément qui contribue à ce respect de la différence. Ainsi nous prenons notre place dans l'évolution qui conduit la société tout entière à chercher une vraie paix, celle qui respecte les diversités et fonde une communion.

Nos épreuves vécues sans esprit de vengeance et dans l'ouverture du pardon évangélique prennent leur part dans les œuvres de la réconciliation et de la paix.

*"Ma raison de vivre c'est de chercher à être un signe de réconciliation, d'unité, là où je vis et où je travaille. Être aussi un signe de pardon. En ce moment il y a beaucoup de rancœur et de haine. Je voudrais aider à faire découvrir la valeur du dialogue, à savoir demander et offrir le pardon à tous.*

*"Il nous a fallu rester fermes dans notre refus de nous laisser identifier à l'un ou l'autre camp, rester libres pour contester pacifiquement les armes et les moyens de la violence et de l'exclusion. Rester ce que nous sommes dans ce contexte, c'est annoncer concrètement un Évangile d'amour pour tous qui implique le respect de la différence. Celle-ci est une vraie bonne nouvelle! La proximité accrue de nos voisins, et leur*

*acceptation de ce que nous sommes nous font accueillir d'eux le message. Un bonheur fait pour grandir!"*.

*"En Algérie, nous découvrons et mettons en œuvre la réconciliation dans la relation entre des hommes de religion différente. C'est là un élargissement considérable des frontières de la mission. Il ne s'agit plus seulement d'appeler les autres à trouver leur place chez nous — ce qui est déjà une grande joie — mais d'accueillir et de mettre en œuvre le don de Dieu qui est proposé à tous quelles que soient les identités religieuses".*

#### **4. Vivre, avec tout le peuple, la résistance au projet inhumain que certains veulent lui imposer**

Le propre du terrorisme, c'est de chercher à soumettre un groupe humain, par la terreur, à des choix faits par une minorité et refusés par la majorité. En l'occurrence, pour l'Algérie, ces choix sont surtout ceux de la minorité fanatique de l'intégrisme islamique violent, même s'il existe d'autres groupes recourant à la violence. Leur projet inhumain vise à soumettre toute la population à leurs conceptions de la vie, de la société, de la religion. Ils cherchent à imposer par la terreur ce projet archaïque et inhumain aux écrivains et aux journalistes qui pensent différemment, aux femmes qui ont une autre conception de la condition féminine, aux croyants musulmans qui choisissent un islam du respect de l'autre et de non-violence, et aux simples citoyens qui doivent se plier à une lecture unique et contraignante de l'islam, etc.

Assumer, comme chrétiens, la menace qui pèse sur les non-musulmans — réputés infidèles et ennemis de l'islam — c'est prendre sur nous notre part de résistance, avec toute la société, au projet inhumain qu'on cherche à lui imposer.

*"Nous sommes dans la même situation que la plupart des Algériens. Avec eux nous voulons vivre cette résistance pour l'avenir. Nous y voyons un appel très expressif de la vocation particulière de notre Église. En Algérie, et plus largement au Maghreb, nous ne sommes pas une Église pour les chrétiens mais une Église de chrétiens qui veulent vivre une relation évangélique avec les Maghrébins musulmans".*

*"La place de l'Église est sur toutes les lignes de fracture, entre les blocs humains et à l'intérieur de chaque être humain, partout où il y a des blessures, des exclusions, des marginalisations. Quand l'humain est en péril il n'est pas permis au chrétien de désertier".*

#### **5. Suivre Jésus-Christ dans cet amour qui va jusqu'à risquer sa vie pour le peuple**

Depuis que la terreur islamiste fait peser quotidiennement sa menace sur nos vies, il nous est impossible de ne pas garder dans le cœur cette phrase de Jésus: *Il n'y a pas de plus grand amour que de donner sa vie pour ceux que l'on aime*" (Jn 15,13).

Nous recevons tous les jours des conseils de prudence des ambassades, de nos familles, des congrégations religieuses, voire même de nos amis algériens. Ces pressions trouveront une nouvelle force pendant les vacances de cet été 1996. Mais nous sommes très sensibles à la cohérence de notre situation à haut risque avec tout le message évangélique. Les thèmes du bon pasteur, du serviteur souffrant, de la "suite du Christ" sur son chemin de croix, motivent chaque jour notre résolution. La célébration de l'Eucharistie — vie donnée du Christ — nourrit notre propre offrande de vie et lui donne la force des fidélités quotidiennes.

*"Pendant toute cette crise nous avons progressé dans la connaissance du mystère de Jésus particulièrement comme Serviteur souffrant. Et aujourd'hui encore à travers les textes de la liturgie, nous découvrons à nouveau Jésus comme le Juste victime de l'opposition des hommes de violence et de sang..."*

*Nous découvrons à nouveau Jésus dans le Serviteur souffrant et au même moment comme celui qui donne à toutes les souffrances des innocents leur signification, qui en révèle la fécondité pour la venue du salut du peuple, et qui les transforme en offrande, en sacrifice dans son eucharistie, dans notre Eucharistie, en sacrifice de la Nouvelle Alliance..."*

*Fixant nos yeux sur Jésus, le Messie souffrant, nous sommes aussi invités à fixer nos yeux sur son attente de l'Heure, sur son obéissance de Serviteur souffrant, sur sa dépendance par rapport à sa vocation, à sa mission, lui l'Envoyé du Père, lui qui est venu pour vivre et dévoiler cette qualité d'amour qui va*

*jusqu'au don de soi, et qui culmine comme l'Heure donnée par le Père...*

*Nous l'avons vécu en acceptant de ne connaître ni le jour ni l'heure de la délivrance. Nous l'avons vécu en rejoignant chaque jour plus profondément notre vocation baptismale qui est de passer avec tout le peuple, de l'heure des ténèbres à celle de la lumière, de l'heure de la haine à celle de l'amour et de l'heure de la mort à celle de la vie”.*

## **6. Vivre l'intercession pour tout le peuple**

Jamais comme pendant cette crise, on ne nous avait autant demandé de prier pour la paix, avec tout le peuple. Beaucoup de personnes, dans la tradition musulmane, hésitent à faire appel à la prière des non-musulmans qui sont souvent considérés comme des infidèles dont la prière serait sans valeur.

La gravité de la crise traversée par le pays invite tous les croyants de bonne volonté à passer par-dessus les barrières confessionnelles et à s'unir dans la prière. Nos amis nous demandaient de prier pour la paix dans la société algérienne. Ils ont aussi prié Dieu pour la libération des moines.

*“Jamais auparavant, on ne nous avait demandé avec autant d'insistance, de prier Dieu pour qu' Il nous donne sa paix. C'est là une invitation à vivre notre vocation. Ne sommes-nous pas l'Église de l'Algérie? L'un des lieux majeurs où l'Église vit sa fidélité c'est l'intercession. La prière pour la paix nous met d'ailleurs dans la vérité. Car nous avons tous compris, pendant cette crise, à quel point nous avons besoin d'apprendre à faire la paix, à partager la paix”.*

## **7. Vivre les Béatitudes**

Comme chrétiens minoritaires, nous nous trouvons dans une situation de dépendance radicale par rapport à la société algérienne. Cela fait de nous des pauvres, non pas dans ce sens où nous pourrions vivre au niveau des plus pauvres de ce pays, mais dans ce sens où nous n'avons aucun pouvoir entre nos mains, où nous dépendons radicalement de la société majoritaire. Cette condition d'hommes ou de femmes sans vraie défense s'est encore accrue avec les menaces des groupes armés sur notre vie. Mais, par la grâce de Dieu, nous avons souvent pu assumer

cette existence désarmée comme un don de Dieu qui nous livre à nos frères, comme il s'est livré lui-même à sa condition humaine de juif palestinien, sans pouvoir devant les autorités juives ou romaines de son temps.

Nous pensons que Dieu nous donne ainsi une chance d'accueillir et de vivre les Béatitudes.

*“Il y a des situations humaines qui sont en quelque sorte comme un lieu naturel pour les Béatitudes. Le texte de Matthieu fait allusion à l'une de ces situations. ‘Bienheureux ceux qui pleurent, ils seront consolés’. Il y a aussi les temps de la persécution: ‘Bienheureux êtes-vous lorsqu'on vous persécute et que l'on dit faussement contre vous toute sorte de mal à cause de moi... Soyez dans la joie et l'allégresse, car votre récompense est grande dans les cieux’ (Mt 5,5; 11-12).*

*La situation qui est la nôtre aujourd'hui en Algérie c'est une situation pour que grandissent parmi nous les fruits des Béatitudes...*

*Ces lieux et ces temps pour vivre les Béatitudes sont ouverts aussi à tous les Algériens hommes et femmes, qui ont le cœur disponible au don de Dieu”.*

## **II. RÉFLEXIONS SUR LES ÉPREUVES**

### **DE NOTRE COMMUNAUTÉ ET SUR NOTRE TÉMOIGNAGE**

#### **1. La disparition d'une présence chrétienne**

Les attaques contre notre communauté et la crise algérienne ont entraîné la disparition de la présence chrétienne dans la quasi-totalité des localités ou des régions situées en dehors du Grand Alger et dans les principaux quartiers populaires de la capitale. La plupart des lieux où se vivait une relation entre chrétiens et musulmans sont maintenant privés de toute présence chrétienne. Pour beaucoup de ces lieux, on peut craindre, à vues humaines, que cette disparition ne soit définitive.

Si, dans la foi, nous faisons de cette souffrance un sacrifice, on ne peut considérer cette disparition autrement que comme la fin du témoignage chrétien dans ces lieux et parmi ces personnes. D'autres

Églises ont ainsi disparu, par exemple, en Nubie, au nord du Soudan au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ou en Turquie dans les régions où vivaient autrefois des Grecs, des Arméniens, des chrétiens syriaques, sans parler de la disparition de l'Église des premiers siècles en Afrique du Nord. La fin d'une présence chrétienne et la fin de son témoignage sont toujours une grande tristesse pour ceux qui croient au don que Dieu fait au monde par l'Évangile et par l'Église. L'attaque contre nos frères de Tibhirine a manifesté au grand nombre leur vocation: mais, à vues humaines, cette attaque a fait disparaître le Monastère.

## **2. La persécution qui nie le droit de l'autre à l'existence est un crime contre l'homme et contre Dieu**

La violence criminelle d'un groupe humain contre d'autres groupes humains marque toujours la faillite de la société. C'est un crime contre l'humanité du point de vue des droits de l'homme, et une insulte à Dieu du point de vue de la foi. C'est une attitude qui déshonore et déshumanise ceux qui la mettent en œuvre. Les violences dont nous sommes les victimes en Algérie sont d'abord pour nous un sujet de tristesse, parce que nous aimons le peuple algérien et que nous souffrons de tout désordre dont des Algériens sont les auteurs.

Nous savons que l'Église, traditionnellement, vénère ses martyrs. Cependant, devant la violence, nous pensons d'abord à ceux qui se dégradent et déshonorent leur peuple, en éliminant ceux qu'ils considèrent comme leurs adversaires simplement parce qu'ils sont différents d'eux. Ces sentiments ont été bien exprimés par le P. Christian dans son testament. Certes, nous savons également que le groupe humain duquel nous sommes issus a souvent, lui aussi, dans le passé, recouru à la violence injuste, mais ceci ne justifie pas, aujourd'hui, le recours à une nouvelle violence. Nous ne sommes pas dans le peuple algérien pour que les violences se réveillent, mais pour que naissent de nouvelles relations entre chrétiens et musulmans.

## **3. "Il n'y a pas de plus grand amour que de donner sa vie pour ses amis"**

Devant l'épreuve il est impossible à un chrétien de ne pas entendre l'appel de Jésus à vivre, jusqu'au bout, l'amour des frères. *"Il n'y a pas de plus grand amour que de donner sa vie pour ses amis"* (Jn 15,13 ). C'est dans cette perspective que se

comprend le témoignage chrétien jusqu'au "martyre". Le martyre exprime et implique une fidélité qui va jusqu'au bout de la mission reçue, à cause de Dieu de qui nous la tenons, et à cause des frères à qui Dieu nous a envoyés.

Il est vrai que beaucoup d'autres personnes peuvent être conduites à risquer leur vie, par exemple dans le cadre de leur profession, comme membres des forces de l'ordre, comme ouvriers dans des métiers dangereux, mais aussi dans certaines compétitions sportives, voire même dans le milieu du grand banditisme, de la drogue, etc. Ce qui fait d'une mort un martyre, c'est la part d'amour quelle véhicule et la fidélité à Dieu et aux frères qu'elle exprime. Le martyre implique une offrande de soi qui refuse la haine, l'appel à la vengeance et à la revanche, à la suite de Jésus qui disait: *"Père pardonne-leur ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils font"* (Lc 23,34). En ce sens, le martyre est le témoignage suprême rendu à Dieu, qui est Amour, et à la création nouvelle.

## **4. Chaque vie humaine a une valeur infinie et n'appartient qu'à Dieu, source de la vie**

L'exaltation chrétienne du martyre a parfois, dans le passé, donné l'impression que l'on méconnaissait le prix de la vie humaine. Après deux siècles de lutte pour les droits et la dignité de l'homme, on ne peut aujourd'hui risquer une vie humaine sans se poser profondément la question du respect de cette vie. Les pouvoirs fanatiques n'hésitent pas à conduire à la mort des milliers de jeunes au nom d'une idéologie. Les grandes nations modernes sont, en sens inverse, de plus en plus attentives à protéger la vie de chacun de leurs citoyens, y compris dans les forces armées engagées dans un conflit.

C'est, à mon point de vue, une question sérieuse posée à tout responsable chrétien, dans les situations où la fidélité chrétienne pourrait se payer au prix de la vie. La tradition de l'Église a d'ailleurs toujours refusé le titre de martyr, à ceux qui provoquaient leurs adversaires et les contraignaient en quelque sorte à user de la violence pour se débarrasser d'eux. Le chemin est étroit entre la pusillanimité à l'heure de l'épreuve, comme le mauvais berger de l'Évangile, et le fanatisme qui conduit à la mort des militants manipulés par des chefs peu respectueux du prix de chaque vie humaine.

## 5. La manifestation du Royaume dans la Passion de l'homme

Ref. *Mission de l'Église*,  
No. 113, Octobre 1996.

Les réserves exprimées précédemment étaient nécessaires. Il y a une grande tristesse à voir disparaître une présence d'Église et à rencontrer sur notre route une violence injuste qui nous prend des frères et des sœurs. Nos frères moines ont vécu avec nous ces épreuves depuis le début de la crise. Plusieurs de ceux ou de celles qui ont été victimes de la violence dans notre communauté étaient très proches du monastère de Notre-Dame de l'Atlas pour différentes raisons, en particulier Henri Vergès, Christian Chessel et Odette Prévost en tant que membres du "Ribat", mais aussi chacun et chacune des victimes, y compris bien sûr toutes les victimes algériennes, connues de nous et d'eux ou inconnues. Et voici qu'eux aussi nous ont été enlevés pour un temps, puis définitivement.

Nous avons atteint le sommet de notre épreuve, d'abord avec notre inquiétude sur leur sort, puis avec leur mort. Mais dans le même temps, nous sommes emportés avec eux dans une manifestation de notre vocation qui dépasse tout ce que nous avons pu imaginer. Ils vivaient cachés sur la montagne, complètement offerts à leur Seigneur et, à cause de Lui, à leurs frères et voisins de Tibhirine. Mais le secret de leur offrande de vie a été rendu public par leur épreuve même.

Cette offrande de vie était un "secret du Roi", "un secret de Dieu", qui seul voyait, là-haut sur la montagne, ce que chacun vivait dans le silence de sa cellule, sur les terrains de travail quotidien ou à travers la prière communautaire de l'office et l'Eucharistie.

Voici que soudain leur absence devient une présence évangélique non seulement pour toute notre petite Église d'Algérie, pour l'Église de France ou d'Europe, pour l'Église universelle, mais aussi pour tous les croyants en Algérie et pour tous les hommes de bonne volonté dans le pays et ailleurs.

Voici que des musulmans sincères prennent dans leurs mains les sept cierges de leur présence cachée et veulent les porter, dans la prière et le jeûne, sur le chemin qui conduit de la grande mosquée de Paris à Notre-Dame.

Nous sommes ramenés à ce mystère de mort et de résurrection que nous avons médité, avec leur présence absente pendant la Semaine Sainte, et qui nous enseigne la manifestation du Royaume de Dieu dans la Passion de l'homme.

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# RELIGIOUS PLURALITY AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DEBATE

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Jacques Dupuis, SJ

*In a paper presented in Baar, Switzerland, (9-15 January 1990) at a symposium sponsored by the 'Dialogue with Living Faiths' section of the World Council of Churches the author discusses, in the light of different paradigms of salvation, the Christological problem that is at the heart of a theology of religions: 'Is Jesus Christ the one and universal Saviour?'*

## INTRODUCTION

The Christological problem has always been at the heart of the Christian theology of religions. It remains so today. In fact, the present context of religious plurality and the practice of inter-religious dialogue give to the Christological question new emphasis and urgency. It is generally agreed that the New Testament bears an unequivocal witness to the finality of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour of humankind. The question is, however, being asked whether in the present context of dialogue such a massive affirmation needs not be re-examined and re-interpreted. Does it belong to the substance of the revealed message, or is it due to the cultural idiom in which the experience of the early Christians has been expressed? In the light of what we know today about the followers of other religious traditions and of the traditions themselves, is it still possible to make their salvation depend on the particular historical event of Jesus of Nazareth, about whom often or whom otherwise they have failed to recognise? Is Jesus Christ the one and universal Saviour? And, if so, how can we account for the salvation in him of millions of people who do not acknowledge him?

It is important to note that the question being asked is about Jesus Christ, not about the Christian Church or churches. The Christological question, not the ecclesiological one is at the heart of the debate; and in whatever way theology may conceive the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church, both can never be placed on one and the same level of necessity. Only of Jesus does the Gospel of John say that he is 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14:6): and only of the 'man Christ Jesus' does Paul affirm that he is the 'one mediator between God and men' (1 Tim 2:5), and Peter that 'there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must

be saved' (Acts 4:12). A Christocentric theology of religions needs to be clearly distinguished from an ecclesiocentric perspective to the same.

## Different paradigms of salvation

The various theological positions on the subject have been differently classified by theologians. One classification distinguishes four main opinions: 1) an ecclesiocentric universe and an exclusive Christology. 2) a Christocentric universe and an inclusive Christo-logy; 3) a theocentric universe and a normative Christology: 4) a theocentric universe and a non-normative Christology. For the sake of simplicity other classifications reduce the spectrum of opinions to three main categories: ecclesiocentrism, Christo-centrism, and theocentrism; or, equivalently, exclusivism, inclusivism, and 'pluralism'.

The first opinion holds that the explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and membership of the Church are required for salvation; it maintains the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* in its rigid interpretation. The second seeks to combine the twofold New Testament affirmations of the concrete and universal salvific will of God, on the one hand, and of the finality of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour, on the other; it affirms that the mystery of Jesus Christ and of his Spirit is present and operative outside the boundaries of the Church, both in the life of individual persons and in the religious traditions to which they belong and which they sincerely practice. The third opinion holds that God has manifested and revealed himself in various ways to different peoples in their respective situations; no finality of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation is to be upheld, for God saves people through their own

tradition even as he saves Christians through Jesus Christ. Thus, for the exclusivist position Jesus Christ and the Church are the necessary way to salvation: for the inclusivist Jesus Christ the way of all; according to the pluralist model Jesus Christ is the way for Christians while the respective traditions constitute the way for the others.

It should be noted that the three categories above have but an indicative value and may not be taken rigidly. They leave room for many shades of opinion among theologians. Taken rigidly, they would become misleading as they would freeze theological opinions into the straight-jacket of preconceived labels. They nevertheless have the merit of showing clearly that the universality of the mediatorship of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation is at the centre of the debate.

### **Ecumenical dimension of the theology of religions**

In the context of the ecumenical discussion on the theology of religions it is no less important to note that, rather than representing distinct church traditions, the various opinions of the spectrum cut across the different churches. It may be true that the exclusivists paradigm is mainly held by Protestants of the evangelical tradition; yet the concrete attitudes of missionaries belonging to various churches would seem more often than not to betray a similar theological stand, notwithstanding — on the Roman Catholic side — the official disavowal of the rigid interpretation of the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. On the other hand, the inclusivist paradigm, while being proposed by a large number of Roman Catholic theologians, is not their exclusive preserve any more than is the pluralist the preserve of liberal Protestants. Both these models are being proposed — with notable variations — by authors belonging to distinct church traditions. Theology of religions should not be misconstrued to be a factor of division between the churches; it rather offers an opportunity for a broad consensus — within a diversity of opinions — as members of the various churches reflect together on their common Christian identity in the context of the plurality of religions.

### **The Catholic perspective**

This paper is primarily intended as a brief presentation of the state of the question from a Catholic perspective. It may therefore be useful to show succinctly what direction the teaching authority of the

Roman Catholic Church has taken in recent years on the subject of other religions and their relationship to Christianity.

I have already recalled the disavowal by authoritative church teaching of the exclusivist position: salvation must be held possible outside the Church. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) has reaffirmed this doctrinal stand in unambiguous terms in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, nn. 16-17), as well as in its declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions (*Nostra Aetate*), its Decree on the Church's missionary activity (*Ad Gentes*), and its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). A celebrated passage of the later document, after stating how Christians come in contact with the paschal mystery of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, affirms clearly that the same applies — 'in a way known to God' — for members of the other religious traditions. It says: 'All this holds true not for Christians only, but also for all men of goodwill in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery' (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

Several points need to be noted here. First, the Council looks at God's universal salvific will not as an abstract possibility but as a concrete reality, actually operative among people. Second, the concrete possibility of salvation available to all men and women of goodwill is salvation through Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery. Third, this salvation reaches out to them through the universal action of the Holy Spirit. Fourth, the manner in which salvation in Jesus Christ is made available outside the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit remains for us mysterious. This last point does not amount to saying that the 'how' of salvation outside the Church lies altogether beyond the scope of theological investigation; however, whatever theological explanation may be given would have to preserve the reference to Christ and his Spirit. God's saving grace or the faith that justifies has, even outside the Church, a Christological and pneumatological dimension.

Has the Second Vatican Council gone beyond affirming that salvation in Jesus Christ is available to persons outside the Church? Does it consider the other religious traditions as constituting valid ways of salvation for their followers? For sure, the Second

Vatican Council is the first Council in a long conciliar history to speak positively of the other religions. It recognises positive elements not only in individual persons belonging to those traditions, but in the traditions themselves. It speaks of ‘elements of truth and grace’ (*Ad Gentes*, n. 9), of ‘seeds of the Word’ (*Ad Gentes*, nn. 11, 15), and of ‘a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men’ (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 2) lying hidden in them. However, it leaves unanswered the question how the saving mystery of Jesus Christ operates in the members of the other religious traditions through the Holy Spirit. Yet, it is clear to the Council that those traditions cannot be considered as channels of salvation for their followers without reference to the mystery of Jesus Christ — outside whom there is no salvation.

### **The inclusivist perspective**

This is the point on which the inclusivist theory and the pluralist one are sharply divided. The inclusivist model — of which there exist different varieties — professes to hold fast to the universal significance of the mystery of Jesus Christ, constitutive of salvation, as affirmed by the New Testament. While, however, the saving mystery of Jesus Christ is available to Christians in and through the Church, it reaches out to the followers of the other religious traditions, in some mysterious way, through these traditions themselves. There is thus one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ; but there exist different channels through which the saving action of the one mediator attains people inside and outside the Church through his Spirit. Admittedly, the Church, as the eschatological community representing sacramentally the mystery of Christ, mediates the mystery of salvation in an eminent way; but it is not the only channel of the mystery. The same attains people outside the Church in the concrete situations in which they find themselves; that is, in and through the religious traditions to which they belong, which inspire their faith-response to God and in which this response finds concrete expression. For the inclusivist theory, therefore, the task to be accomplished by a theology of religions consists in showing that the Christ-event, its particularity in time and space notwithstanding, has universal value and cosmic consequences in such wise that the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ is everywhere present and operative through the Spirit.

### **The pluralist perspective**

The pluralist theory finds this inclusivist theological agenda unpracticable and unnecessary. It

criticises the inclusivist model for pre-empting the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ and thereby affirming *a priori* the superiority of Christianity over the other religious traditions. It also accuses inclusivism for evaluating the other traditions not in themselves but in relation to Christianity; for seeing them not as they see themselves but as pale and incomplete realisations of what Christianity embodies in its fullness. In the present context of religious plurality and dialogue, such a position would seem untenable, for it assumes that Christianity is the yardstick by which all re-ligious traditions must be theologically evaluated and closes the door in advance to an inter-religious dialogue on a basis of equality. A paradigm shift is therefore necessary.

### **The theocentric perspective**

It consists in substituting for the Christocentric perspective a theocentric one, according to which Jesus Christ and his saving mystery no longer stand at the centre of God’s saving design for humankind. That place belongs to God alone towards whom all the religious traditions, Christianity included, tend as to their end. It needs to be recognised plainly that God, who ‘shows no partiality’ (Acts 10:34), has manifested and revealed himself in various ways to different peoples in different cultures, and that the various religious traditions of the world embody, each in its own way, such divine self-revelation. It follows that, partial contradictions notwithstanding, the various religious traditions complement each other in their differences; what is required between them is neither mutual exclusion nor inclusion of the many into one, but reciprocal enrichment through open interaction and sincere dialogue.

The pluralist paradigm is not, however, a monolithic theory; it covers different theological positions the distinction between which needs to be rapidly mentioned. In its extreme form — with which the term ‘Copernican revolution’ is associated — pluralism calls for Christianity to give up all claim to uniqueness or finality for Jesus Christ in the order of God’s relationship with humankind. Universality can only be understood in the sense that the person of Jesus Christ and his message is capable — as other saving figures also are — of a universal appeal to people, that is, of arousing in them a response to God and to that which is truly human. But such a universal appeal is in no way a distinctive or exclusive feature of Christianity.

Other versions of the pluralist model are more restrained. They hold — perhaps illogically, once the

claim for the universal constitutive mediatorship of Jesus Christ is abandoned — that among the various paths, all valid in themselves and in their own right, Jesus Christ keeps a relative prominence: compared with other saving figures, he remains the ideal symbol of the way in which God has been dealing with humankind salvifically, and in this sense is 'normative'. According to some views, Christianity must renounce its claim to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ once for all. Others, on the contrary, call on Christianity to put such claim 'between brackets' provisionally to allow for sincere dialogue with the other religious traditions; the practice of dialogue will perhaps help rediscover that Jesus Christ is indeed unique.

### **A false dilemma**

This survey, though rapid and incomplete, allows for two observations to be made. The first is that at stake in the Christological debate in the context of religious plurality is the traditional Christocentrism of much of Christian theology. A growing number of theologians suggest that a Christocentric perspective is no longer tenable in the present context and that a theocentric model must be substituted for it. This assumption, however, calls for some clarifications. Are Christocentrism and theocentrism mutually opposed as two distinct paradigms? To affirm it constitutes by itself a theological and Christological option. The Christocentrism of Christian tradition is not, in fact, opposed to theocentrism. It never places Jesus Christ in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed him at the centre of his saving plan for humankind, not as the end but as the way, not as the goal of every human quest for God but as the universal mediator of God's saving action towards people. Christian theology is not faced with the dilemma of being either Christocentric or theocentric; it is theocentric by being Christocentric and *vice-versa*. This amounts to saying that Jesus Christ is the sacrament of God's encounter with people. The man Jesus belongs, no doubt, to the order of signs and symbols; but in him who has been constituted the Christ by God who raised him from the dead (cf. Acts 2:32) God's saving action reaches out to people in various ways, knowingly to some and to others unknowingly.

### **High and low Christology**

The second observation has to do with the kind of Christology that underlies the Christocentric and the theocentric paradigms. In terms of the distinction often made between a high and a low Christology, it

is clear that the inclusivist or Christocentric model of a theology of religions is consonant with a high Christology in which the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is unambiguously recognised; on the contrary the pluralist or theocentric model is in keeping with a low Christology which either questions or prescind from such ontological affirmations about Jesus Christ. It is not by chance that the main protagonist of a 'Copernican revolution' in Christology in the context of the theology of religions, had pre-viously advocated the 'demythologisation' of the mystery of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Both paradigms are in this regard fully consequent with themselves. The implication is, as the Christian tradition also testifies, that the only adequate foundation on which the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ can be based is his personal identity as the Son of God made man, as God's incarnate Word. No other Christology can, in the last analysis, account persuasively for Christ's universal mediatorship in the order of salvation.

### **The 'Reign of God' paradigm**

Concretely, then, the choice between a Christocentric and a theocentric paradigm in the theology of religions depends on the option which is made between a high, ontological Christology and a low Christology which remains deliberately at the functional level. There remains to be asked whether other paradigm shifts from the Christocentric model are possible and to review several suggestions which have been made in that direction in recent years.

One suggestion is that an eschatological perspective be substituted for the traditional Christocentrism. The new 'paradigm shift' would consist in centring the theology of religions no longer on the Christ-event but on the reign of God which builds itself up through history and is destined to reach its fulfilment in the eschatological time. The focus in the new perspective would no longer be on the past but on the future: God and his reign are the goal of history towards which all religions, Christianity included, tend together as to their common destiny.

The reign of God model is a new version of the theocentric. It has the merit of showing that the followers of other religious traditions are already members of the reign of God in history and that together with Christians they are destined to meet in God at the end of time. Does this new model, however, represent a paradigm shift from the Christological? To affirm it would be to forget that the reign of God has broken through the history in Jesus Christ

and the Christ-event; that it is through the combined action of the risen Christ and his Spirit that the members of the other religious traditions share in the reign of God historically present: finally, that the eschatological reign to which the members of all religious traditions are summoned together is at once God's reign and that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once again theocentrism and Christocentrism seem to go hand in hand as two aspects of the same reality: they do not constitute distinct paradigms. Nevertheless, in the context of dialogue the reign of God model has the advantage of showing how Christians and the members of other religious traditions are co-pilgrims in history, heading as they do together towards God's eschatological fullness.

### **The pneumatocentric perspective**

Another suggestion is to base the theology of religions on the recognition of the universal presence and action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God has been universally present throughout human history and remains active today outside the boundaries of the Christian fold. He it is who 'inspires' in people belonging to other religious traditions the obedience of saving faith, and in the traditions themselves a word spoken by God to their adherents. In short, the Holy Spirit is God's 'point of entry' into the life of people and of peoples; hence his immediate action opens up the way for a distinct model in the Christian theology of religions, no longer Christocentric but pneumato-centric.

That the Holy Spirit is God's 'point of entry' wherever and whenever God reveals and communicates himself in history to people, is certain. Indeed, it is so in virtue of the necessary correspondence which exists between the mystery of the Triune God as he is in himself and that of his manifestation in the world. Outside the Church as inside, the immanent presence of the Holy Spirit is the reality of God's saving grace. However, does a model centred on the Spirit represent for a theology of religions a paradigm shift from the Christocentric model? It does not seem to be so. For the pneumatological perspective is only partly distinct from the Christological. In fact, both are inseparable in the Christian mystery, in so far as the cosmic influence

of the Holy Spirit is essentially bound to the universal action of the risen Christ. The Spirit of God whose abiding presence confers salvation is at the same time the Spirit of Christ, communicated by the risen Lord. His saving function consists in centring people on the Christ whom God has established as the mediator and the way leading towards him. Christ, not the Spirit, is at the centre. Christocentrism and pneumatology must not be set in mutual opposition as two distinct economies of salvation; they are two inseparable aspects of one and the same economy. Nevertheless, the specific role played by the Holy Spirit in salvation both inside and outside the Church, and the immediacy of his action make it possible to recognise his personal imprint wherever salvation is at work. The influence of the Spirit manifests the operative presence of God's saving action in Jesus Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

Our survey of the various theological models for a Christian theology of religions seems to lead to the following conclusion. The ecclesiocentric model is too narrow a perspective to account for the presence of God and of his saving grace outside the Church. A paradigm shift is called for from the ecclesiocentric to a Christocentric perspective. Whether the Christocentric model turns out in turn to be unequal to the task and a further paradigm shift is required towards a theocentric model is a debated question among Christologists; while low Christologists will be inclined to agree, their high counterparts will insist that a theocentric perspective is intrinsic in the Christocentric model itself; it must not be construed as a distinct paradigm. But if a Christian theology of religions needs to be Christocentric, it must bring out the full dimension of the mystery of Jesus Christ and put in evidence its cosmic significance. In particular, a Christian theology of religions must show that the members of the other religious traditions, together with Christians, share in the reign which God has established in history through Jesus Christ, and that the Spirit of Christ is present among them and operative in them.

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