



VATICAN ENGAGEMENTS

A Muslim Theologian's Journey in Muslim–Catholic Dialogue

AREF ALI NAYED

I



VATICAN ENGAGEMENTS

VATICAN ENGAGEMENTS

*A Muslim Theologian's Journey
in Muslim–Catholic Dialogue*



Aref Ali Nayed

VOLUME I



كلام البحوث والإعلام
KALAM RESEARCH & MEDIA

*For my teachers and students
at the Uthman Pasha Madrasa
in Tripoli, Libya*

In loving memory of
MUHAMMAD ELMSALATE
and
ABU BAKR RA^cBOOB

© 2015. Aref Ali Nayed/Kalam Research & Media, Abu Dhabi. All rights reserved.

KALAM RESEARCH & MEDIA
P.O. Box 78000, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
www.kalamresearch.com

ISBN 978-9948-446-74-3 *paperback*

ISBN 978-9948-446-75-0 *hardback*

The Publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without written permission of the author.

Cover Image © St. Peter's, Vatican / Sohail Nakhooda/ Kalam Research & Media
Back cover author portrait © Kalam Research & Media

Design and typesetting by Sohail Nakhooda

Printed in the UAE

CONTENTS



<i>Foreword</i>	<i>vii</i>
PART ONE: THE REGENSBURG LECTURE	
1. Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections by <i>Pope Benedict XVI</i>	3
2. A Muslim's Commentary on Benedict XVI's "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections" by <i>Aref Ali Nayed</i>	14
PART TWO: THE MARTINETTI DEBATE	
3. Unbridled Will or Logos? The God of Islam and the Christian God by <i>Alessandro Martinetti</i>	39
4. Our God and Your God is One by <i>Aref Ali Nayed</i>	44
5. God Does Not Violate the First and Universal Principles of Being by <i>Alessandro Martinetti</i>	57
PART THREE: DEBATE WITH MICHAEL CUYPERS ON SACRED INTERPRETATION	
6. Tradition as Seen by the Muslim Faith, Yesterday and Today by <i>Michael Cuypers</i>	105
7. On Muslim and Catholic Approaches to Sacred Hermeneutics by <i>Aref Ali Nayed</i>	112
PART FOUR: THE BRADLEY LECTURE	
8. Compassion and Understanding in Islam	121
PART FIVE: THE YALE LECTURE	
9. The Same God?	139

**PART SIX: CARDINAL TAURAN AND THE
EID MESSAGE**

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 10. Christians and Muslims: Called to Promote a Culture of Peace
by <i>Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran</i> | 153 |
| 11. A Muslim's Message of Thanks for the Vatican's
"Message for the End of Ramadan"
by <i>Aref Ali Nayed</i> | 156 |

PART SEVEN: THE MAGDI ALLAM CONTROVERSY

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 12. "Benedict XVI Tells Us That We Must Conquer Fear"
by <i>Magdi Cristiano Allam</i> | 165 |
| 13. Comments on the Papal Baptism of Magdi Allam
by <i>Aref Ali Nayed</i> | 171 |
| 14. "Our Ailing World Did Not Need Another Provocation"
Interview with <i>El País</i> | 173 |
| 15. "May We Be Permitted to Express in Turn Our Own Displeasure"
by <i>Federico Lombardi</i> | 177 |

PART EIGHT: A COMMON WORD INITIATIVE

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 16. The Promise of "A Common Word" | 181 |
| 17. Frequently Asked Questions About the "Common Word
Initiative" | 186 |
| 18. Rome Press Conference | 191 |
| 19. Interview with the Catholic News Service | 203 |
| 20. From Security to Compassion | 206 |
| 21. Caring for the Young | 210 |

PART NINE: THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS AND LECTURE

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 22. Ayatology and Rahmatology: Islam and the Environment | 219 |
| 23. Attacking the Essence: On Why Muslims Are So Hurt by
the Danish <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> Outrage | 227 |
| 24. The Usurpation of God's Greatness | 233 |
| 25. Ibrahim and Islam | 240 |
| 26. Dialogical Engagement as Vigilant Remembrance (<i>Dhikr</i>) | 244 |
| 27. Doubt and Certitude | 248 |
| 28. The Muslim's Way to Allah | 258 |
| 29. Reading Scripture Together: Toward a Sacred Hermeneutics
of Togetherness | 263 |

- | | |
|--------------|-----|
| <i>Index</i> | 271 |
|--------------|-----|

FOREWORD



AREF ALI NAYED IS A LEADING MUSLIM THEOLOGIAN AND EXPERT on Muslim–Christian relations. During the last decade Nayed has been one of the key proponents of the Common Word Initiative, which brought together an impressive number of Muslim theologians, scholars and intellectuals to promote peace with their Christian counterparts. Nayed’s own contribution to inter-faith understanding, however, pre-dates the Common Word initiative, and in this volume we bring together his published and unpublished essays of the engagements he has had over many years on a number of critical issues with the Roman Catholic Church.

That the focus of his writings has been on the Catholic Church, Catholic clergy and lay experts for much of the last two decades should be no surprise. Dr. Nayed, uniquely for an orthodox Muslim scholar in this time, studied and taught at pontifical universities in Rome, particularly the Gregorian and at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI).

Born and raised in Libya, he was steeped in traditional knowledge, studying with many of the greatest living scholars and sages from his country. Living in exile in North America he finished his secondary education in the U.S. and completed his undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate studies in Canada attaining degrees in engineering and philosophy. While he is rooted in the North African traditions of Maliki jurisprudence, Ash‘ari theology and the ancient spirituality of Islam, he also has a formidable grasp of Christian theology, western philosophical traditions, hermeneutics, semiotics and speech-act theory. This unique background makes him an invaluable interlocutor and bridge builder between two religious traditions and civilizations.

Nayed’s sincerity in the search for truth and peace is immediately apparent in the various essays in this volume. His theological elabora-

FOREWORD

tion is eclectic, yet always firmly rooted in his own religious tradition. He does not shy away from robustly articulating and defending the verities of his own faith, but neither does he trivialize or mock the Other. His approach is always and in everything respectful and generous in spirit. His theological vision is always and in everything sustained by compassion and a hope that knowledge and prayer can overcome dark horizons of hatred and ignorance. It is precisely because he takes the Other seriously that he holds the task of “co-theologizing”, as he puts it, to be of existential significance and urgency. Working on theology with people from other religious traditions is a vital hermeneutical key for understanding both the Other and ourselves.

This volume then has no other purpose than to serve as a window to this Libyan theologian’s contribution to inter-faith understanding whilst also being an accessible source for his writings on Catholicism. Most of the material was written during his time in Rome, in Muslim-Catholic encounters, for Catholic publications, or on issues that touched on aspects of the Catholic church.

There was no effort to maintain rigorous chronological order in the presentation of these essays, except that we have divided them into themes for easier accessibility. And in order to preserve accuracy and respect in the conversations, we have reproduced in full here both Pope Benedict XVI’s text of his Regensburg address and also those of Nayed’s interlocutors. The next volume will include a response to Professor Alessandro Martinetti’s final rejoinder, which Dr. Nayed was unable to prepare due to the onset of the Libyan revolution in 2011, which forced him to attend to the diplomatic and political needs of his country.

We are deeply grateful to PISAI, Dr Sandro Magister (Chiesa.com), Professor Alessandro Martinetti, Matthey Sherry (who ably translated from Italian all of Professor Martinetti’s responses), Haroon Sugich Muhammad Ridwaan, Sarah Louise Nakhooda, Chris Galloway, and Muhammad and Mustafa Ansa, for their assistance in making this publication possible.

SOHAIL YOUNUS NAKHOODA
Kalam Research & Media, Abu Dhabi

PART ONE



THE REGENSBURG LECTURE

CHAPTER I



Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections^{*}

POPE BENEDICT XVI

*Your Eminences, Your Magnificences,
Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

IT IS A MOVING experience for me to be back again in the university and to be able once again to give a lecture at this podium. I think back to those years when, after a pleasant period at the Freisinger Hochschule, I began teaching at the University of Bonn. That was in 1959, in the days of the old university made up of ordinary professors. The various chairs had neither assistants nor secretaries, but in recompense there was much direct contact with students and in particular among the professors themselves. We would meet before and after lessons in the rooms of the teaching staff. There was a lively exchange with historians, philosophers, philologists and, naturally, between the two theological faculties. Once a semester there was a *dies academicus*, when professors from every faculty appeared before the students of the entire university, making possible a genuine experience of *universitas*—something that you too, Magnificent Rector, just mentioned—the experience, in other words, of the fact that despite our specializations which at times make it difficult to communicate with each other, we made up a whole, working in everything on the basis of a single rationality with its various aspects and sharing responsibility for the right use of reason—this reality became a lived experience. The university was also very proud of its two theological faculties. It was clear

^{*} Lecture delivered on Tuesday, 12th September 2006, at the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg. Reprinted with permission from the Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

that, by inquiring about the reasonableness of faith, they too carried out a work which is necessarily part of the “whole” of the *universitas scientiarum*, even if not everyone could share the faith which theologians seek to correlate with reason as a whole. This profound sense of coherence within the universe of reason was not troubled, even when it was once reported that a colleague had said there was something odd about our university: it had two faculties devoted to something that did not exist: God. That even in the face of such radical scepticism it is still necessary and reasonable to raise the question of God through the use of reason, and to do so in the context of the tradition of the Christian faith: this, within the university as a whole, was accepted without question.

I was reminded of all this recently, when I read the edition by Professor Theodore Khoury (Münster) of part of the dialogue carried on—perhaps in 1391 in the winter barracks near Ankara—by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of both.¹ It was presumably the emperor himself who set down this dialogue, during the siege of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402; and this would explain why his arguments are given in greater detail than those of his Persian interlocutor.² The dialogue ranges widely over the structures of faith contained in the Bible and in the Qur’an, and deals especially with the image of God and of man, while necessarily returning repeatedly to the relationship between—as they were called—three “Laws” or “rules of life”: the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur’an. It is not my intention to discuss this question in the present lecture; here I would like to discuss only one point—itself rather marginal to the dialogue as a whole—which, in the context of the issue of “faith and reason”, I found interesting and which can serve as the starting-point for my reflections on this issue.

In the seventh conversation (διάλεξις—controversy) edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: “There is no compulsion in religion”. According to some of the experts, this is probably one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur’an, concerning

holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the “Book” and the “infidels”, he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.”³ The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. “God”, he says, “is not pleased by blood—and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) is contrary to God’s nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats ... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death ...”.⁴

The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God’s nature.⁵ The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality.⁶ Here Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God’s will, we would even have to practise idolatry.⁷

At this point, as far as understanding of God and thus the concrete practice of religion is concerned, we are faced with an unavoidable dilemma. Is the conviction that acting unreasonably contradicts God’s nature merely a Greek idea, or is it always and intrinsically true? I believe that here we can see the profound harmony between what is Greek in the best sense of the word and the biblical understanding of faith in God. Modifying the first verse of the Book of Genesis, the first verse of the whole Bible, John began the prologue of his Gospel with the words: “In the beginning was the λόγος”. This is the very word used

by the emperor: God acts, *ὁν λόγῳ*, with *logos*. *Logos* means both reason and word—a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason. John thus spoke the final word on the biblical concept of God, and in this word all the often toilsome and tortuous threads of biblical faith find their culmination and synthesis. In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* is God, says the Evangelist. The encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” (cf. *Acts* 16:6–10)—this vision can be interpreted as a “distillation” of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.

In point of fact, this rapprochement had been going on for some time. The mysterious name of God, revealed from the burning bush, a name which separates this God from all other divinities with their many names and simply asserts being, “I am”, already presents a challenge to the notion of myth, to which Socrates’ attempt to vanquish and transcend myth stands in close analogy.⁸ Within the Old Testament, the process which started at the burning bush came to new maturity at the time of the Exile, when the God of Israel, an Israel now deprived of its land and worship, was proclaimed as the God of heaven and earth and described in a simple formula which echoes the words uttered at the burning bush: “I am”. This new understanding of God is accompanied by a kind of enlightenment, which finds stark expression in the mockery of gods who are merely the work of human hands (cf. *Pss* 115). Thus, despite the bitter conflict with those Hellenistic rulers who sought to accommodate it forcibly to the customs and idolatrous cult of the Greeks, biblical faith, in the Hellenistic period, encountered the best of Greek thought at a deep level, resulting in a mutual enrichment evident especially in the later wisdom literature. Today we know that the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced at Alexandria—the Septuagint—is more than a simple (and in that sense really less than satisfactory) translation of the Hebrew text: it is an independent textual witness and a distinct and important step in the history of revelation, one which brought about this encounter in a way that was decisive for the birth and spread of Christianity.⁹ A profound encounter of faith and reason is taking place here, an encounter

between genuine enlightenment and religion. From the very heart of Christian faith and, at the same time, the heart of Greek thought now joined to faith, Manuel II was able to say: Not to act “with *logos*” is contrary to God’s nature.

In all honesty, one must observe that in the late Middle Ages we find trends in theology which would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit. In contrast with the so-called intellectualism of Augustine and Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which, in its later developments, led to the claim that we can only know God’s *voluntas ordinata*. Beyond this is the realm of God’s freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise to positions which clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God’s transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions. As opposed to this, the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which—as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated—unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf. Certainly, love, as Saint Paul says, “transcends” knowledge and is thereby capable of perceiving more than thought alone (cf. *Eph* 3:19); nonetheless it continues to be love of the God who is *Logos*. Consequently, Christian worship is, again to quote Paul—“λογιχη λατρεία”, worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason (cf. *Rom* 12:1).¹⁰

This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history—it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and

some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.

The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith has been countered by the call for a dehellenization of Christianity—a call which has more and more dominated theological discussions since the beginning of the modern age. Viewed more closely, three stages can be observed in the programme of dehellenization: although interconnected, they are clearly distinct from one another in their motivations and objectives.¹¹

Dehellenization first emerges in connection with the postulates of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Looking at the tradition of scholastic theology, the Reformers thought they were confronted with a faith system totally conditioned by philosophy, that is to say an articulation of the faith based on an alien system of thought. As a result, faith no longer appeared as a living historical Word but as one element of an overarching philosophical system. The principle of *sola scriptura*, on the other hand, sought faith in its pure, primordial form, as originally found in the biblical Word. Metaphysics appeared as a premise derived from another source, from which faith had to be liberated in order to become once more fully itself. When Kant stated that he needed to set thinking aside in order to make room for faith, he carried this programme forward with a radicalism that the Reformers could never have foreseen. He thus anchored faith exclusively in practical reason, denying it access to reality as a whole.

The liberal theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ushered in a second stage in the process of dehellenization, with Adolf von Harnack as its outstanding representative. When I was a student, and in the early years of my teaching, this programme was highly influential in Catholic theology too. It took as its point of departure Pascal's distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In my inaugural lecture at Bonn in 1959, I tried to address the issue,¹² and I do not intend to repeat here what I said on that occasion, but I would like to describe at least briefly what was new about this second stage of dehellenization. Harnack's central

idea was to return simply to the man Jesus and to his simple message, underneath the accretions of theology and indeed of hellenization: this simple message was seen as the culmination of the religious development of humanity. Jesus was said to have put an end to worship in favour of morality. In the end he was presented as the father of a humanitarian moral message. Fundamentally, Harnack's goal was to bring Christianity back into harmony with modern reason, liberating it, that is to say, from seemingly philosophical and theological elements, such as faith in Christ's divinity and the triune God. In this sense, historical-critical exegesis of the New Testament, as he saw it, restored to theology its place within the university: theology, for Harnack, is something essentially historical and therefore strictly scientific. What it is able to say critically about Jesus is, so to speak, an expression of practical reason and consequently it can take its rightful place within the university. Behind this thinking lies the modern self-limitation of reason, classically expressed in Kant's "Critiques", but in the meantime further radicalized by the impact of the natural sciences. This modern concept of reason is based, to put it briefly, on a synthesis between Platonism (Cartesianism) and empiricism, a synthesis confirmed by the success of technology. On the one hand it presupposes the mathematical structure of matter, its intrinsic rationality, which makes it possible to understand how matter works and use it efficiently: this basic premise is, so to speak, the Platonic element in the modern understanding of nature. On the other hand, there is nature's capacity to be exploited for our purposes, and here only the possibility of verification or falsification through experimentation can yield decisive certainty. The weight between the two poles can, depending on the circumstances, shift from one side to the other. As strongly positivistic a thinker as J. Monod has declared himself a convinced Platonist/Cartesian.

This gives rise to two principles which are crucial for the issue we have raised. First, only the kind of certainty resulting from the interplay of mathematical and empirical elements can be considered scientific. Anything that would claim to be science must be measured against this criterion. Hence the human sciences, such as history, psychology, sociology and philosophy, attempt to conform themselves to this canon of scientificity. A second point, which is important for our

reflections, is that by its very nature this method excludes the question of God, making it appear an unscientific or pre-scientific question. Consequently, we are faced with a reduction of the radius of science and reason, one which needs to be questioned.

I will return to this problem later. In the meantime, it must be observed that from this standpoint any attempt to maintain theology's claim to be "scientific" would end up reducing Christianity to a mere fragment of its former self. But we must say more: if science as a whole is this and this alone, then it is man himself who ends up being reduced, for the specifically human questions about our origin and destiny, the questions raised by religion and ethics, then have no place within the purview of collective reason as defined by "science", so understood, and must thus be relegated to the realm of the subjective. The subject then decides, on the basis of his experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and the subjective "conscience" becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical. In this way, though, ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it. Attempts to construct an ethic from the rules of evolution or from psychology and sociology, end up being simply inadequate.

Before I draw the conclusions to which all this has been leading, I must briefly refer to the third stage of dehellenization, which is now in progress. In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was an initial inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieux. This thesis is not simply false, but it is coarse and lacking in precision. The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed. True, there are elements in the evolution of the early Church which do not have to be integrated into all cultures. Nonetheless, the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between

faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.

And so I come to my conclusion. This attempt, painted with broad strokes, at a critique of modern reason from within has nothing to do with putting the clock back to the time before the Enlightenment and rejecting the insights of the modern age. The positive aspects of modernity are to be acknowledged unreservedly: we are all grateful for the marvellous possibilities that it has opened up for mankind and for the progress in humanity that has been granted to us. The scientific ethos, moreover, is—as you yourself mentioned, Magnificent Rector—the will to be obedient to the truth, and, as such, it embodies an attitude which belongs to the essential decisions of the Christian spirit. The intention here is not one of retrenchment or negative criticism, but of broadening our concept of reason and its application. While we rejoice in the new possibilities open to humanity, we also see the dangers arising from these possibilities and we must ask ourselves how we can overcome them. We will succeed in doing so only if reason and faith come together in a new way, if we overcome the self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically falsifiable, and if we once more disclose its vast horizons. In this sense theology rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith.

Only thus do we become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today. In the Western world it is widely held that only positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on it are universally valid. Yet the world's profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures. At the same time, as I have attempted to show, modern scientific reason with its intrinsically Platonic element bears within itself a question which points beyond itself and beyond the possibilities of its methodology. Modern scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as a given, on which its metho-

dology has to be based. Yet the question why this has to be so is a real question, and one which has to be remanded by the natural sciences to other modes and planes of thought—to philosophy and theology. For philosophy and, albeit in a different way, for theology, listening to the great experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding. Here I am reminded of something Socrates said to Phaedo. In their earlier conversations, many false philosophical opinions had been raised, and so Socrates says: “It would be easily understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the rest of his life he despised and mocked all talk about being—but in this way he would be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer a great loss”.¹³ The West has long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality, and can only suffer great harm thereby. The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur—this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. “Not to act reasonably, not to act with *logos*, is contrary to the nature of God”, said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian interlocutor. It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university.

NOTES

¹ Of the total number of 26 conversations (διάλεξεις—Khoury translates this as “controversy”) in the dialogue (“Entretien”), T. Khoury published the 7th “controversy” with footnotes and an extensive introduction on the origin of the text, on the manuscript tradition and on the structure of the dialogue, together with brief summaries of the “controversies” not included in the edition; the Greek text is accompanied by a French translation: “Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman. 7^e Controverse”, *Sources Chrétiennes* n. 1115, Paris 1966. In the meantime, Karl Förstel published in *Corpus Islamico-Christianum* (Series Graeca ed. A. T. Khoury and R. Glei) an edition of the text in Greek and German with commentary: “Manuel II. Palaiologus, Dialoge mit einem Muslim”, 3 vols., Würzburg-Altenberge 1993–1996. As early as 1966, E. Trapp had published the Greek text with an introduction as vol. II of *Wiener byzantinische Studien*. I shall be quoting from Khoury’s edition.

² On the origin and redaction of the dialogue, cf. Khoury, pp.22–29; extensive comments in this regard can also be found in the editions of Förstel and Trapp.

³ Controversy VII, 2c: Khoury, pp.142–143; Förstel, vol.I, VII. Dialog 1.5, pp.240–241. In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur'an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.

⁴ Controversy VII, 3b–c: Khoury, pp.144–145; Förstel vol. I, VII. Dialog 1.6, pp.240–243.

⁵ It was purely for the sake of this statement that I quoted the dialogue between Manuel and his Persian interlocutor. In this statement the theme of my subsequent reflections emerges.

⁶ Cf. Khoury, p.144, n.1.

⁷ R. Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue*, Paris 1956, p.13; cf. Khoury, p.144. The fact that comparable positions exist in the theology of the late Middle Ages will appear later in my discourse.

⁸ Regarding the widely discussed interpretation of the episode of the burning bush, I refer to my book *Introduction to Christianity*, London 1969, pp.77–93 (originally published in German as *Einführung in das Christentum*, Munich 1968; N.B. the pages quoted refer to the entire chapter entitled “The Biblical Belief in God”). I think that my statements in that book, despite later developments in the discussion, remain valid today.

⁹ Cf. A. Schenker, “L'Écriture sainte subsiste en plusieurs formes canoniques simultanées”, in *L'Interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa. Atti del Simposio promosso dalla Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede*, Vatican City 2001, pp.178–186.

¹⁰ On this matter I expressed myself in greater detail in my book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco 2000, pp.44–50.

¹¹ Of the vast literature on the theme of dehellenization, I would like to mention above all: A. Grillmeier, “Hellenisierung-Judaisierung des Christentums als Deuteprozessen der Geschichte des kirchlichen Dogmas”, in idem, *Mit ihm und in ihm. Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven*, Freiburg 1975, pp.423–488.

¹² Newly published with commentary by Heino Sonnemans (ed.): *Joseph Ratzinger-Benedikt XVI, Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der theologia naturalis*, Johannes-Verlag Leutesdorf, 2nd revised edition, 2005.

¹³ Cf. 90c–d. For this text, cf. also R. Guardini, *Der Tod des Sokrates*, 5th edition, Mainz-Paderborn 1987, pp.218–221.



A Muslim's Commentary on Benedict XVI's "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections"

AREF ALI NAYED

In the Name of God, Merciful, Compassionate. Blessed are all the Prophets of God and all their true and righteous followers. Blessed is the last and the seal of all Prophets and all Prophecy: Muhammad. Blessed are his kin, companions, and followers. Peace upon those who follow righteousness and divine guidance.

THE PONTIFF OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH of Christianity, Benedict XVI, delivered a lecture titled "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections" at the University of Regensburg (12 September, 2006).¹

The Pontiff's lecture gave rise to a deep and painful rupture in Catholic–Muslim relations on many fronts: diplomatic, political and, most intensely, popular. The superficial media coverage of the lecture, and the intensity of popular reactions to that coverage, have largely prevented clear-headed considerations and critiques of its content. This paper strives to conduct a thorough study of the lecture.

It is hoped that a balanced and fair consideration of the lecture can prepare for an urgently needed theological and philosophical dialogue between Muslim and Catholic scholars, including the Catholic Pontiff himself. Such a dialogue is urgently needed in order to repair the damage in Catholic–Muslim relations and to heal fresh wounds that have compounded the pains of an already tarnished world.

Benedict's paper is a complex work that has to be engaged at various levels and from various angles: theologically, philosophically, and

politically. It is hoped that this paper will at least start a process of further Muslim reflections and discussions on the subject.

In order not to risk distorting, through paraphrasing, the meaning of Benedict XVI's Lecture, I shall quote heavily from the official Vatican translation posted on the Vatican Website and copyrighted by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Furthermore, in order to make one's presuppositions and tools clear from the outset, it is important to point out that the author of this paper is a devout Sunni Muslim theologian of the Ash'ari school, Maliki in jurisprudential tendency, and Shadhili/Rifa'i in spiritual leanings. The author is deeply committed to the possibility of fruitful philosophical discussions on the basis of our common humanity, and to the possibility of nourishing inter-religious dialogue on the basis of our common belief in the One True God. These commitments have translated into several years of philosophical and inter-religious study and practice.

It is important to appreciate that Benedict XVI is speaking, at least to some extent, as a former professor who is coming back to his beloved university to speak, once again, as a professor. Of course, the discourse of a person, and its reception, depends a great deal upon which aspect he happens to ground the discourse. Different discourses are associated with different normative standards and are to be judged according to the standards appropriate to them.

It is one thing to consider the lecture as that of Joseph Ratzinger *qua* Benedict XVI, Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, and world leader of all Catholics. It is another to consider the lecture as that of Joseph Ratzinger *qua* German professor of theology. The nostalgic tone of the opening passages of the lecture, and the reference to earlier lectures of the 1950s, make it clear that Ratzinger is, to some extent, speaking, once again, as German professor of theology. Regardless of his being "created anew" as Pope Benedict XVI, and noting the ecclesiastical garb in which he gave the lecture, it is only natural that, despite the charming nostalgia, receivers of the lecture cannot simply suspend the ecclesiastical role of Ratzinger.

It is inevitable, therefore, that the lecture is received as that of a Roman Catholic Pope, and not just that of a university professor. The Vatican clearly assumes this by posting the lecture as that of the "Holy

Father” and as part of an “Apostolic Journey”. As the Roman Philosopher Cicero and the British Philosopher Francis Herbert Bradley both point out, one’s duties depend a great deal upon one’s position or station. It is important to note that as Professor Ratzinger was speaking in his former university, Pope Benedict XVI was very much present to his listeners.²

In a cruel world full of wars and strife, much of which is between Christians and Muslims (under whichever flag or motto they happen to fight), it is extremely important that religious leaders of all religions speak and act responsibly. The gravity of responsibility is in direct correlation with the importance of the religious office from which one speaks. There are all sorts of university professors who say all sorts of unpleasant things about Islam and Muslims. They are often simply, and rightly, ignored. The lecture of Professor Ratzinger was very much that of Pope Benedict XVI. This is why it must be engaged at all possible levels.

It is also important for Muslims, in the spirit of fairness dear to Islam, to appreciate and support whatever positive aspects there are in the lecture. One such aspect is the very important discourse, which is unfortunately relegated to the end of Benedict XVI’s Lecture, on the importance of deepening and widening the notion of Western Reason so as to include and accommodate the contribution that revelatory religiosity can make. The anti-positivist critique of common Western University understandings of Reason can be readily appreciated and accepted by many Muslims. Of course, such a critique is not original in that it follows from the anti-positivist developments of the philosophy of science that have emerged since Popper and his students wrote their seminal works. Nevertheless, the use of such anti-positivist discourse in order to make way for revelatory discourse is fruitful for all.³

Had Benedict XVI started with his last passages and developed them further, and had he appreciated the historical commitment of Islam throughout the ages to reasonableness and proper discussion, we would have had an uplifting discourse conducive to co-living and peaceful Christian-Muslim co-resistance to the pretensions of irreverent scientistic Reason. Islam can actually be Christianity’s best ally against the arrogant pretensions of scientistic positivism, and for a deeper and more spiritual Reason. Alas, that is not what Benedict XVI actually

did. Let us look at how he actually did start and then follow the Lecture section by section, quoting important sections as we progress.

Benedict XVI begins his lecture, nicely enough, with reminiscences on his time at the University of Bonn in 1959, where, "We would meet before and after lessons in the rooms of the teaching staff. There was a lively exchange with historians, philosophers, philologists and, naturally, between the two theological faculties".

It is clear that Benedict XVI is very much disposed toward, and that he cherishes, historical, philosophical, philological, and theological discussions. It is important that he is engaged at all these levels. From the contents of the lecture, it is very clear that Benedict XVI can do with more meaningful discussion with serious Muslim scholars.

There is no doubt that he is very much interested in Islam and that he takes it very seriously. However, the study materials and sessions he engages with seem to be of a very particular and narrow type. Being a Catholic scholar who respects specialization, Benedict XVI seems to rely heavily on the works of Catholic Orientalists, some of whom are not particularly sympathetic to Islam.

In 2005, Benedict XVI devoted the annual retreat that he usually has with his former doctoral students to the study of the Concept of God in Islam. Very little is known about the contents of this retreat, but glimpses of what it must have been like can be gathered from two (sometimes conflicting) reports that were later provided by two of the key participants. The topic and content of the retreat are of direct relevance to Benedict XVI's Regensburg Lecture. It would be most helpful for understanding Benedict XVI's true position regarding Islam if the contents of this important "private" Seminar were to be made fully public.⁴

It would have also been helpful to Benedict XVI to hear Muslim theologians themselves on what they thought and taught about God. Instead, Benedict XVI invited his students to listen to, and discuss with, two Catholic scholars specialized in Islamics and Christian-Muslim relations. Both scholars, the German Jesuit Christian Troll and the Egyptian Jesuit Samir Khalil Samir, are renowned Catholic experts in Islamic studies. However, both tend to be deeply suspicious of what may be called "traditional Islam". Troll is fundamentally convinced that Islam must be reformed and is an expert on, and an active

supporter of non-traditionalist “reformers”. Samir is less charitable to Islam, be it traditional or “reformed”, and is often quite hostile. Together with some other close advisors of Benedict XVI, such as the American Jesuit Joseph Fessio, Samir has clearly been taking an Islamophobic approach which may explain the direction of Benedict XVI’s lecture.

It is noteworthy that some of Benedict’s closest advisors on Islam have recently been hostile characters who believe that Islam, at least as it stands, is inherently violent and who are filled with fear of its expansion. Several Catholic or secular advisors who know better than to instill Islamophobia into the Pontiff’s heart have generally been marginalized, retired, or ignored. Some, like the deeply respected Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, have been moved to other, respectable, but less central positions. The subsuming of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious dialogue under the Pontifical Council for Culture, and the continued deterioration of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, have combined to create a situation where Benedict XVI is increasingly being advised on Islam by the least sympathetic Catholic scholars of it.⁵

It is important that Muslim scholars strive to intellectually and theologically engage Benedict XVI, and not through the filters of some Islamophobic Catholic Orientalists. It is important for the Catholic Pontiff to select his advisors more widely, and to be weary of narrow and prejudiced views, even if they happen to be held by so-called “experts” of Islamic studies. He should also be careful of trusting the purely ethnic claims to expertise of some Arab Catholic scholars. It is well known that some members of minorities within a larger culture sometimes have the least expertise on its full richness. Some members of minorities are often obsessed with feelings of persecution and fears of destruction. There are some Arab Catholic Islamic studies specialists who have very dubious views on Islam and Muslims, and whose Islamophobic views are trusted because they happen to be Arabs.

On the other hand, there are Arab Christians, both Catholic and non-Catholic, who do have a very deep understanding and appreciation of Islam and Muslims, and who can provide the Pontiff with very good advice. Respected and fair figures such as Bishop Michel Sabah and Metropolitan George Khodr can offer Benedict XVI a deep

understanding of Islam and Muslims. There are also several non-Arab Catholic Orientalists who can be of great help to Benedict XVI on Islamic matters. These scholars include Maurice Bourmans, Michel Lagarde, Etienne Renault, and Thomas Michel.

In times of war and strife we humans tend to trust the views of those who tend to make us fear the perceived enemy and who help us mobilize our energies against it. It does not at all help Benedict XVI, or our tarnished world, for the people he trusts on Islamic matters to openly say things such as:

Benedict is aiming at more essential points: theology is not what counts, at least not in this stage of history; what counts is the fact that Islam is the religion that is developing more and is becoming more and more a danger for the West and the world. The danger is not in Islam in general, but in a certain vision of Islam that never openly renounces violence and generates terrorism, fanaticism.⁶

Or, worse still:

The West is once again under siege. Doubly so because in addition to terrorist attacks there is a new form of conquest: immigration coupled with high fertility. Let us hope that, following the Holy Father's courageous example in these troubled times, there can be a dialogue whose subject is the truth claims of Christianity and Islam.⁷

Such views are very dangerous and will only lead to more war and strife. They are the exact counter-part and mirror-image of the views of pseudo-Islamic terrorists.

Christians and Muslims must be on the alert for such Manichean and polarizing views, and must strive to live daily in deep and fair discernment so as to improve the painful situation in which we all live.

It is essential, therefore, that Muslims and reasonable, serious, and fair non-Muslim scholars engage the Pontiff in scholarly and intellectual discussion of the kind he praises at the beginning of his Lecture.

Once a semester there was a *dies academicus*, when professors from every faculty appeared before the students of the entire university, making possible a genuine experience of *universitas*—something that you too, Magnificent Rector, just mentioned—the experience, in other words, of the fact that despite our specializations which at times makes it

difficult to communicate with each other, we made up a whole, working in everything on the basis of a single rationality with its various aspects and sharing responsibility for the right use of reason—this reality became a lived experience.

Benedict XVI clearly appreciates the experience of “*universitas*” through the periodic encounter with the other. He sees clearly that specialization can lead to a dangerous narrowing that closes horizons of true communication. It is important to point out that just as there is a “*universitas*” based on our common humanity and reasonableness, there is a monotheistic *universitas* based on our common belief in the One True God. It is important that Christians and Muslims, despite (and because of) their dedicated devotions to their own religions, work together in mutual-respect and dialogue for the sake of the One True God. Such a dialogue must become a lived experience that leads us closer to world peace.

Benedict XVI then points out the importance of research and discussions about the reasonableness of faith, and that in such research and discussions, even radical skepticism has to be considered and engaged.

That even in the face of such radical skepticism it is still necessary and reasonable to raise the question of God through the use of reason, and to do so in the context of the tradition of the Christian faith: this, within the university as a whole, was accepted without question.

Recognition of the importance of such research and discussion is the very foundation of the extensive and deep field of Islamic Studies called *ʿIlm al-Kalam*, or Muslim systematic theology. As a matter of fact, many Kalam manuals open with extensive considerations of the position of the skeptics by way of establishing the validity of seeking out reasons in support of religious faith. All great scholars of Kalam recognize the fact that discussions, argumentations, and disputations with others can only be conducted on the basis of a shared human reasonableness that forms a kind of “*universitas scientiarum*”.

The manuals of Kalam are full of extensive reasoned discussions with skeptics, atheists, naturalists, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Hindus, Aristotelians, Platonists, and a host of other religions and philosophies.

It is most unfortunate that Benedict's appreciation of discussions based on *universitas scientiarum* does not seem to extend to Islam and Muslims. Despite the fact that many Muslim scholars and institutions responded positively to the Catholic Church's new-found openness to dialogue with them (as expressed in the documents of Vatican II) and worked very hard in many dialogue settings, Benedict XVI seems to think (from later parts of his lecture) that such reasonable discussion is only possible within a European/Christian/Hellenistic setting. This is both historically and actually untrue and unfair.

After his fairly benign Lecture opening, Benedict XVI suddenly conjures up a most troubling legacy:

I was reminded of all this recently, when I read the edition by Professor Theodore Khoury (Münster) of part of the dialogue carried on—perhaps in 1391 in the winter barracks near Ankara—by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of both.

It is not clear how Paleologus's dialogue "reminded" Benedict XVI of "all this". I would have liked to believe that Benedict XVI was reminded of the value of reasoned discussion, based on common humanity, by the fact that a Christian and a Muslim were having a reasoned discussion even in the midst of a siege. Alas, I think a more likely reading is that Benedict XVI was reminded of the presumed intimate relationship between Christian faith and reason by the fact that a Christian, faced with a violent Islam, still focused on the equation of his faith with reasonableness. Benedict XVI very much starting with a "siege" setting resurrects a scene from the siege of Constantinople, with all its associated symbolism:

It was presumably the emperor himself who set down this dialogue, during the siege of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402; and this would explain why his arguments are given in greater detail than those of his Persian interlocutor. The dialogue ranges widely over the structures of faith contained in the Bible and in the Qur'an, and deals especially with the image of God and of man, while necessarily returning repeatedly to the relationship between—as they were called—three "Laws" or "rules of life": the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur'an. It is not my intention to discuss this question in the present

lecture; here I would like to discuss only one point—itself rather marginal to the dialogue as a whole—which, in the context of the issue of “faith and reason”, I found interesting and which can serve as the starting-point for my reflections on this issue.

It is strange that Benedict XVI selected an admittedly “marginal” point from an obscure medieval dialogue, written at a particularly abnormal and tense moment in history, to find a “starting-point” for his reflections on “faith and reason”. One could imagine an infinitely large number of possible, more direct, and sensible starting-points.

Many an alternative starting-point could have helped Benedict XVI make his main points about faith and reason without using a disfigured straw-man Islam. The connection between the medieval dialogue and the main point of the lecture is so strained and distant; invoking the dialogue unnecessarily damages Christian–Muslim relations. This is at a time when we truly need the healing of these relations.

Then, of all the sections of the Emperor’s book, the Pontiff chooses to focus on the one concerning Holy War or *Jihad*:

In the seventh conversation (διάλεκτις—controversy) edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: “There is no compulsion in religion”. According to the experts, this is one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur’an, concerning holy war.

It is also interesting that Benedict, invoking the authority of anonymous “experts”, summarily dismisses the clear and still normative Qur’anic ruling “There is no compulsion in religion” by claiming that it was only upheld by Muhammad (peace be upon him) in times of weakness! Instead of cherishing this ruling and challenging Muslims today to live up to it, the Pontiff dismisses an important Islamic resource for reasonableness and peace by seeing it as a fake Islamic stance that was only ever held because of temporary weakness! This is most unfortunate. The no-compulsion verse has never been revoked and has always been binding.

At no point in history did Muslim jurists legally authorize the forced conversions of people of other religions. This vital verse was founda-

tional for the tolerance that Muslims did concretely demonstrate toward Christians and Jews living in their midst. It is very dangerous for the Pontiff to dismiss a Qur'anic verse that actually formed, and still forms, a juridical and historical guarantee of safety to Christians and Jews living among Muslims.

Furthermore, the disheartening claim by Benedict XVI that Muhammad (peace be upon him) whimsically changed Islam's principles and juridical teachings, depending on his weakness or strength, is simply an echo of prejudiced, unfair views that have surfaced again and again in Christian and Western polemics against Islam. Wiser and fairer advice could have saved Benedict XVI from adopting such prejudices. The image of an opportunist Prophet, which Benedict XVI invokes in passing, is deeply painful and offensive to Muslims. How would Benedict XVI feel if Muslims pointed out that the Catholic Church only became tolerant of Muslims and Jews after it lost its power in Europe, and that this tolerance was really granted by secular states and not by the Church, but opportunistically claimed by it. Such a point is likely to cause pain and offense. Imagine, then, the pain and offense we Muslims feel as Benedict XVI claims that our beloved Prophet is an opportunist who teaches one thing when he is weak, only to reverse it when he is strong.

Benedict XVI goes further: "Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the 'Book' and the 'infidels'". Again, Benedict XVI strangely dismisses, in passing, yet another Islamic resource for tolerance toward Christians and Jews. Islam has always distinguished between "the People of the Book" (Christians and Jews), and mere Pagans. The People of the Book living in Muslim communities were always granted the right to worship in peace largely based on this important distinction. It is very important to note that some of the hateful discourses of recent pseudo-Islamic terrorists have worked very hard to dilute the distinction between Christianity and Paganism (by calling Christians "Cross-Worshippers") precisely in order to remove the juridical protection granted to Christianity and Judaism under Muslim jurisprudence. Benedict XVI seems to imply that such distinctions are minor and only obscure Islam's purported intolerance.

Benedicts XVI then goes on to quote one of the most disturbing

passages in the Emperor's discourse: "... he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness which leaves us astounded, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: 'Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached'".

This hateful and hurtful passage is what the media picked up the most, and what most of the popular Muslim reactions have reacted to. Tragically, Benedict XVI, having invoked this piece of hate-literature back from its historical dormancy, fails to distance himself from the opinion of its original author. He does use such languages as "brusqueness", "leaves us astounded", and "expresses himself forcefully". However, none of these expressions constitutes a negative judgment or rejection of the opinion of the original author. As a matter of fact, they may even be read as indicative of a subtle support of a supposed bravery that may be a bit reckless.

When someone gratuitously invokes a very obscure text that expresses hateful things, one has a moral obligation to explain why he goes out of his way to invoke it, and a further obligation to respond to it, and to dismiss the hate expressed in it. Otherwise, it is very reasonable to assume that the person invoking the hurtful text does mean it, and does share the views expressed within it.

To claim that no hurtful intent was present and that Muslims simply did not understand the text agonizingly adds insult to injury. This is why the quasi-apology of Benedict XVI was not considered adequate by many Muslims. All the Vatican's statements to date, including the address of Benedict XVI, express regret for the fact that Muslims supposedly misunderstood the Pontiff's Lecture and have reacted badly to it.

Such an approach simply accuses Muslims of a lack of understanding and of over-reaction. This approach, instead of meekly and humbly admitting the hurt one has caused, blames the ones being hurt for taking the insult the wrong way! Many devout Catholics have, unfortunately, seen Muslim rejections of the quasi-apology and Muslims' emotional reactions to the words about their Prophet (peace be upon him) as indicative of Benedict XVI's correct and heroic stance.

Benedict goes on:

The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. "God", he says, "is not pleased by blood—and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats ... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death ..."

Interestingly, if one consults a reliable classical Qur'anic book on exegesis (*tafsir*) for an explanation of the verse "There is no compulsion in religion," one would find explanations that are very similar to the Emperor's point about the heart or soul being the abode of faith. All Muslim theological treatises have a section on faith (*iman*). There is unanimity amongst all Muslim theologians that faith resides in the abode of the heart or soul and that no physical compulsion can ever affect it.

It is interesting to note that Benedict XVI was for many years the "Prefect of the Faith" of the Catholic Church. The Prefect of the Faith is the distant modern version of the Inquisition. The Inquisition seldom respected the sanctity of the human heart in matters of faith. Tragically, for Muslims and Jews, especially in Spain, the Church used a dizzying battery of physical torture techniques to get Muslims and Jews to convert to Christianity. The Inquisition never heeded such advice as that of the Emperor: "To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death". We could all learn from this advice.

It is Qur'anically normative for Muslims to call to the path of God through wisdom, wholesome advice, and proper discussion. There is no sanction in Islam for torturing people into conversion. Indonesia and Malaysia have more Muslims than all Arab countries combined. No Muslim army ever entered these lands. How did Islam spread there?

Nevertheless, it will be dishonest or naïve to claim that no Muslim army ever conquered any land. However, creating a domain where

God can be freely worshipped does not entail converting the inhabitants of that domain by force of the 'sword'. Muslim conquests seldom translated into forced conversions. The evidence is clear: Muslim-dominated lands still have Christian minorities. How many Muslims or Jews were left in Spain after the Catholic Ferdinand and Isabella re-conquered it?

Interestingly, Muslims, as immigrants, were only ever able to re-enter Europe under the multi-cultural policies of secular Europe. If the Catholic Church had its way would that have been possible? Benedict XVI himself is famous for rejecting Turkey's plea to become part of Europe due to its lack of the right religious and cultural credentials.

In some past Vatican statements Muslims were sometimes called upon to forget the past (when it comes to the Inquisition or the Crusades). In Islam, acknowledgment and regret are necessary pre-conditions of true repentance and forgiveness. Benedict XVI, by self-righteously invoking the hurtful accusations of a long-dead Emperor, is, astonishingly, oblivious to the use of torture, cruelty, and violence in the history of the Catholic Church, not only against Muslims, but against Jews, and even fellow Christians.

The violence inflicted, or supported, by the Catholic Church extended all the way to modern times through the support of European colonial conquests of the rest of the world. Missionaries, especially Jesuits, went hand-in-hand with colonialists into the Americas, Africa, and Asia. In my native Libya, Italian fascist armies and death squads used to be blessed by the local Catholic authorities in the Cathedral's square before they went to hunt Libyan resistance fighters. This was happening as late as the 1930s. The Ethiopian soldiers the fascists force-marched at the front of the Italian armies bore big red crosses on their chests just as the knights of Saint John did when they slaughtered Tripoli's inhabitants back in the 1500s.

The image of a non-violent hellenistically "reasonable" Christianity contrasted with a violent unreasonable Islam is foundational for the Lecture of Benedict XVI. This self-image is amazingly self-righteous and is oblivious to many painful historical facts. It is very important for our world that we all begin to see the poles that are in our own eyes, rather than focus on the specks in the eyes of our brethren. Benedict XVI says further:

The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature. The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality. Here Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would even have to practice idolatry.

Benedict XVI's "decisive statement": "Not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature". This statement is very complex, and is open to many interpretations and discussions. What is amazing is the swiftness and ease with which it is used to make up what amounts to, a deeply disturbing, false contrast between a peace-loving, reasonable Christianity and a violence-loving, unreasonable Islam!

The reason for this swiftness and ease is the fact that such a contrast is a famous one taken from what may be called "contrast tables" that are often simplistically invoked in some missionary and polemical discourses. The idea of such tables is to put Christianity at the top of one column and Islam at the top of the other. One then goes on to fill the table with such polarities as: Love/Law, Peace/Violence, Freeing/Enslaving, Women-liberating/Women-oppressing, and so on.

Such tables are reminiscent, and are related to the tables the Athenians, the Romans, and even the German Idealists (who do have an influence on the Bavarian Pontiff) often developed to contrast the "Civilized" with the "Barbarian", the "European" with the "non-European". Unfortunately for their proponents, such tables never work. They are grossly over-simplified and create contrasts at a great cost to truth and fairness. In Islam, just as in Christianity, it is not human calculative reason that is salvific, but rather the free underserved grace (*rahma*) of God. One of the many graces that God gifts to human beings is the gift of reason.

Reason as a gift from God can never be above God. That is Ibn Hazm's entire point—a point that was paraphrased in such a mutilated way by Benedict XVI's learned sources. Ibn Hazm, like the Ash'ari theologians with whom he often contended, did insist upon

God's absolute freedom to act. However, Ibn Hazm did recognize, as did most other Muslim theologians, that God freely chooses in His compassion towards His creatures, to self-consistently act reasonably so that we can use our reason to align ourselves with His guidance and directive.

Ibn Hazm, like most other Muslim theologians, did hold that God is not externally bound by anything, including reason. However, at no point does Ibn Hazm claim that God does not *freely* self-commit Himself and honor such commitments. Such divine free-self-committing is Qur'anically propounded "*kataba rabukum ala nafsih al-Rahma*" (Your Lord has committed Himself to compassion). Reason need not be above God and externally normative to Him. It can be a grace of God that is normative because of God's own free commitment to act consistently with it.

A person who believes the last proposition need not be an irrational or unreasonable human being, with an irrational or whimsical God! The contrast between Christianity and Islam on this basis is not only unfair, but also quite questionable.

Granted, the Pontiff is striving to convince a secular university that theology has a place in that reason-based setting. However, this should not go so far as to make God subject to an externally binding reason. Most major Christian theologians, even the reason-loving Aquinas, never put reason above God.

When Muslim theologians make a similar move, they should not be accused of irrationality or unreasonableness. Such misunderstanding is the direct result of simplistic contrast tables of which scholars such as Theodore Khoury are apparently fond.

Benedict XVI should not trust his views on Muslim theology to scholars such as Khoury or Samir Khalil Samir. Their views of Islam and Muslims are often most unfair. He may not want to consult with Muslims, and may not even trust them to know their own doctrines; but he should, at least, consult some serious scholars who are not necessarily from an Arab Christian minority or a very narrow Catholic Orientalist group.

Benedict goes on: "At this point, as far as understanding of God and thus the concrete practice of religion is concerned, we are faced with an unavoidable dilemma. Is the conviction that acting unreasonably con-

tradicts God's nature merely a Greek idea, or is it always and intrinsically true?"

Benedict XVI's way of phrasing this issue is again open to many interpretations and engagements. This is not the place for unpacking a very loaded question. Suffice it to say that talk of the "nature" of God is itself problematic.

Talk of reasonableness and unreasonableness is also quite problematic. What is this reason we are talking about? Is it a human faculty of understanding? If so, what kind of understanding? Is it cognitive? Is it emotive? Is it spiritual? Or is reason, rather, some sort of an ontologically primary agent or emanation, as the neo-Platonists often taught? What sort of reason and reasonableness are we talking about?

Such questions need further and deeper reflections. However, interestingly, the ambiguity and vagueness of the word 'reason' allow for the amazing leap of unifying the Greek and the Christian by appealing to the very Hellenistic Prologue to the Gospel of John.

As Benedict XVI puts it:

I believe that here we can see the profound harmony between what is Greek in the best sense of the word and the biblical understanding of faith in God. Modifying the first verse of the Book of Genesis, the first verse of the whole Bible, John began the prologue of his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the λόγος". This is the very word used by the emperor: God acts, *σὺν λόγῳ*, with *logos*. *Logos* means both reason and word—a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason.

Here we come close to getting a definition of what Benedict XVI means by reason: "a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication". This is indeed close to what John speaks of. However, is this the same reason as the reason of the Greek philosophers? I think not. Reason for most Greek philosophers was more associated with pure contemplation, or *theoria*, than with creative activity or *poesis*. Furthermore, for most Greek philosophers it was being as such or *to on* that was truly 'self-communicating'. Reason for most of them was a human capacity to receive this self-communicating being.

Therefore, the great unifying vision of Benedict, which brings together the Greek with the Christian, turns out to be a move made

possible through the ambiguities of such rich and loaded words as “*logos*” or “reason”. Of course, such moves have often been practiced in the past within the theological, exegetical, and spiritual traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Of course, a great deal of medieval discourse depends precisely on this kind of ambiguity-fuelled leaping. However, it is quite strange that this medieval leaping tactic is being used to bridge the gap between the cool rationalistic reason of the German University and the *logos* of the Catholic Church!

Benedict XVI then makes an astoundingly Hegelian statement: “John thus spoke the final word on the biblical concept of God, and in this word all the often toilsome and tortuous threads of biblical faith find their culmination and synthesis”.

Benedict XVI claims that John spoke the “final word” on the biblical concept of God. He also makes the Hegelian claim that biblical faith took a “toilsome” and “torturous” path to culminate in this Johannine synthesis.

I will leave it to Christian theologians of various denominations and schools to comment on this claim. In light of the cumulative findings of historical-critical research into the Bible, it is very strange that it is still possible to make such critically debatable statements about a biblical faith that is supposedly making a long journey to culminate in a Greco-Christian synthesis.

I am sure Jewish scholars will also find difficulties with the implicit claim that Torah threads of faith are “toilsome” and “tortuous”, and that John was needed to make it all culminate into true and final biblical faith. While Hegelian synthesis and culmination sounds wonderfully exciting to the one with the culmination results, it is sure to bother all who are being culminated!

Then, yet again, the argumentation leaps into Hegelian speculation, but this time introducing a dangerously “European” claim to Christianity:

In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* is God, says the Evangelist. The encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” (cf. *Acts* 16:6–10)—this vision can be

interpreted as a “distillation” of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.

The Asia versus Macedonia contrast is used to justify the strange claim that there is an “intrinsic necessity” of rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.

Thus in Europe and not in Asia, and with European reason and not with Asiatic reason, Christianity comes to unite with “Greek inquiry”. This Hegelian talk suffers from the same Euro-centric tendency of much of Germanic idealist philosophy.

This tendency is very dangerous indeed, for it demotes versions of Christianity that manifest themselves in non-Greek and non-European milieus (e.g., South American, African, and Asian theologies).

It also makes a claim to Reason in general, and to Greek reason, in particular, and appropriates it to make it purely Christian. Thus the historical facts of even clear, let alone partial, Jewish-Hellenistic syntheses (as in Philo of Alexandria), and Muslim-Hellenistic syntheses (as in al-Farabi, Ikhwan al-Safa, and Ibn Sina) are simply denied as impossible. Only the Christian is united with the Greek in a Johannine Hegelian European culmination.

Muslims, like Christians and Jews before and after them, developed many profound philosophical and theological systems, the aim of which was the harmonization of the claims of human reasoning and the truths of divine revelation. The philosophers just mentioned were not alone. Theologians of the Muʿtazili, Ashʿari, Maturidi, Ithna Ashri, Ismaʿili, Ibadi, and even Hanbali schools all strived to articulate their faith in as reasonable a manner as possible. Even introductory texts of Islamic philosophy and theology make this clear. The intricate dialectical and logical works of the great Abdul Jabbar, Ashʿari, Baqilani, Juwayni, Ghazali, Razi, Maturidi, Nasafi, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Sabaʿin, among others, are testaments to the keen Muslim interest in reason and reasonableness when it comes to articulating matters of faith. Even the most conservative of Hanbalis, Ibn Taymmyia, wrote important works on non-Aristotelian logics and has anti-Aristotelian arguments akin to those of Sextus Empiricus!⁸

Benedict XVI, in the closing section of a long passage, that would fit very nicely as a preface to Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion* or *Philosophy of History*, goes on to claim:

A profound encounter of faith and reason is taking place here, an encounter between genuine enlightenment and religion. From the very heart of Christian faith and, at the same time, the heart of Greek thought now joined to faith, Manuel II was able to say: Not to act “with *logos*” is contrary to God’s nature.

The Septuagint is, thus, accorded a primacy that I am sure will sound strange to many Christian ears. The synthesis of biblical faith and Greek reason is simply accorded ultimate value as the culmination of a process through which all other ways of religiosity are relegated to things subsumed and superseded. Yet Benedict XVI, being a scholar of medieval theology, knows that he can not deny certain facts:

In all honesty, one must observe that in the late Middle Ages we find trends in theology which would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit. In contrast with the so-called intellectualism of Augustine and Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which, in its later developments, led to the claim that we can only know God’s *voluntas ordinata*. Beyond this is the realm of God’s freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise to positions which clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God’s transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions.

This passage, while serving its author’s ultimate goal of undermining the theologies mentioned in it, does at least show that Benedict XVI is somewhat aware that other possible theologies do exist, and that Muslim theologians were not alone in caring about the affirmation of God’s sovereignty against human pretensions to govern Him with human criteria.

Unfortunately, he goes on to totally undermine such theologies as not being the true “faith of the Church”. It is also very interesting that, in a follow-on passage, Benedict XVI, for a moment, does affirm a love that transcends knowledge, but then re-interprets that affirmation by claiming it is *logos* that loves. Thus he synthesizes *logos* and reason. It turns out to be reason that actually loves.

Then, in clear and unambiguous terms, we see the actual foundational claim of Benedict XVI, and the ultimate reason for his troubles with Islam:

This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history—it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.

He clearly claims that Europe is the only place where Christianity and Reason culminated in the great synthesis that is European civilization. Thus Europe is Christian-Greek and rational, and Christianity is European-Greek and rational. If Europe-Christianity is to be kept pure, all non-European elements and non-Christian elements must be kept out. This is why Islam and Muslims have no place in this great Hegelian synthesis! This alarming set of neo-colonial ideas supports the thesis of the barbarous (non-Greek) and non-European nature of Islam. Islam, according to this kind of thinking, is “Asiatic”, “non-rational”, and “violent”. It has no place in “Greek”, “rational” and “reasonable” Europe.

Now that Benedict XVI has reached his thesis of the synthesis of the Greek and the Christian into a single *logos*, he proceeds to undermine all attempts to deny this synthesis. He goes on to criticize three phases of what he calls “dehellenization”:

The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith has been countered by the call for a dehellenization of Christianity—a call which has more and more dominated theological discussions since the beginning of the modern age. Viewed more closely, three stages can be observed in the programme of dehellenization: although interconnected, they are clearly distinct from one another in their motivations and objectives.

It is better for Muslims to leave it to Christian theologians to comment on the extent of the fairness and accuracy of Benedict XVI's

assessment of the Christian tradition. However, to this Muslim, it does seem astonishing that Benedict XVI seems to sweep away all of the Reformers' efforts as a dehellenization that undermines the true synthesis earlier celebrated by him. I will also leave it to Protestant theologians to reply to Benedict XVI's sweeping claims.

Benedict XVI then blames the theologian von Harnack for the second dehellenization. I will, again, leave it to von Harnack scholars to reply to the claims made by Benedict XVI. It does strike me as strange, however, to find von Harnack accused of dehellenization. Following Karl Barth, I believe that von Harnack was hellenizing rather than the opposite. He may even be seen as reducing theology to a kind of Aristotelian *phronesis*.

Benedict XVI's third, and last, type of dehellenization, is worthy of more attention.

Before I draw the conclusions to which all this has been leading, I must briefly refer to the third stage of dehellenization, which is now in progress. In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was a preliminary inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieu. This thesis is not only false, it is coarse and lacking in precision. The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed. True, there are elements in the evolution of the early Church which do not have to be integrated into all cultures. Nonetheless, the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.

Yet again, we are faced with a Euro-centric and Greco-centric arrogant approbation of Christianity. I will leave it to Latin American, African, and Asian Christian theologians to address this strange appropriation.

For a Church that is now quite international, the Pontiff is really going out of his way to alienate all who are not a part of Greek-European culture. He is basically claiming that such Greek and European

elements are fundamental to the Christian faith itself. I find the whole claim dangerously arrogant. It is not only Islam and Muslims that are threatened by it. I truly believe that this lecture should alarm Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike.

This alarm is extenuated by the fact that the alarming position is not that of just a Professor or a theologian, but of a Roman Catholic Pontiff who leads millions of human beings. It is, therefore, urgent and vital that Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Secular scholars engage the Pontiff and challenge his views not only on Islam, but also on what it means to be a reasonable human being, and what it means to be a European. As for Islam and its Prophet (peace be upon him), centuries of cruel and vicious attacks against them, both verbal and physical, have only made them stronger. The sun shall still shine no matter what dark clouds strive to do.

Let us pray for a better world, a peaceful world, a respectful world. Let us engage in a dialogue that is based on mutual respect, and is elevated above mere polemics. The One God has created us all, and willed for us to be so different, let us learn more about each other, and let us, together, construct a better world, for God's sake.

NOTES

¹ Published under the title: "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections", Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican, 2006. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html. All quotations are from the Lecture unless otherwise indicated.

² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press Cambridge, 1913). See also: Francis Herbert Bradley, "My Station and Its Duties", in *Ethical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

³ I refer here to the post-positivist philosophy of science of Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, and others. For the many meanings of Reason and Rationality and the possibility of deeper understandings of them, see also: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

⁴ On this important Seminar, see: Samir Khalil Samir, S.J., "When Civilizations Meet: How Joseph Ratzinger Sees Islam", *Chiesa*, May 4, 2006. [<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/53826?eng=y>]. Also Sandro Magister, "Islam and Democracy, a Secret Meeting at Castel Gandolfo", *Chiesa*, January 23, 2006. [<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/45084?eng=y>]

⁵ For confirmation of this account, see the excellent article by Abdul Hakim Murad,

VATICAN ENGAGEMENTS

“Benedict XVI and Islam: The First Year”, [<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/AHM-Benedict.htm>.]

⁶ See, Samir, “When Civilizations Meet”.

⁷ Joseph Fessio, S.J., “Is Dialogue with Islam Possible? Some Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI’s Address at the University of Regensburg”, *Ignatius Insight*, September 18, 2006. [http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2006/jfessio_reflections_sept06.asp].

⁸ The following is a useful standard text on Islamic philosophy and theology: Fakhry, Majid, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

PART TWO



THE MARTINETTI DEBATE



Unbridled Will or Logos? The God of Islam and the Christian God

ALESSANDRO MARTINETTI

[The commentary on the Regensburg lecture by Aref Ali Nayed led to a debate in 2006 between him and an Italian scholar, Alessandro Martinetti in the pages of the leading Catholic website edited by Sandro Magister, Chiesa. In the chapters that follow we publish here the text in full of this exchange.]

THE COMMENTARY BY AREF ALI NAYED on Benedict XVI's "lectio" in Regensburg is stimulating some reflection, in particular on the relationship between God and reason. Nayed writes:

Reason as a gift from God can never be above God. That is Ibn Hazm's entire point—a point that was paraphrased in such a mutilated way by Benedict XVI's learned sources. Ibn Hazm, like the Ash'ari theologians with whom he often contended, did insist upon God's absolute freedom to act. However, Ibn Hazm did recognize, as did most other Muslim theologians, that God freely chooses in His compassion toward His creatures, to self-consistently act reasonably so that we can use our reason to align ourselves with His guidance and directive.

Ibn Hazm, like most other Muslim theologians, did hold that God is not externally bound by anything, including reason. However, at no point does Ibn Hazm claim that God does not freely self-commit Himself and honors such commitments. Such divine free-self-committing is Qur'anically propounded "*kataba rabukum ala nafsih al-Rahma*" (Your Lord has committed Himself to compassion). Reason need not be above God, and externally normative to Him. It can be a grace of God

that is normative because of God's own free commitment to acting consistently with it.

A person who believes the last proposition need not be an irrational or unreasonable human being, with an irrational or whimsical God! The contrast between Christianity and Islam on this basis is not only unfair, but also quite questionable.

Granted, the Pontiff is striving to convince a secular university that theology has a place in that reason-based setting. However, this should not go so far as to make God subject to an externally binding reason. Most major Christian theologians, even the reason-loving [Thomas] Aquinas never put reason above God.

In Nayed's view, then, Saint Thomas "never put reason above God". But not placing reason above God is not the same thing as asserting, as Nayed does, that "God is not externally bound by anything, including reason", and that reason "can be a grace of God that is normative because of God's own free commitment to act consistently with it".

Saint Thomas would never have subscribed to these assertions; on the contrary, he vigorously opposed them. And together with him, the Catholic magisterium does not agree with them, but disputes them. It thus rejects the depiction of a God who "freely chooses, in his compassion towards his creatures, to act reasonably in consistency with himself so that we can use our reason to align ourselves with His guidance and directives".

If asserting that reason is not normative for God, and that God is consistent with Himself only out of a supremely free decision and is not externally bound to reason, and if this is the same as asserting—as it seems to me that Nayed does—that God could exist and act in disdain of reason if only he wished to do so by an act of supreme and limitless freedom, then it is opportune to clarify that Thomas, and with him the Catholic magisterium, rejects this conviction, glimpsing in this an irrational voluntarism incompatible with right reason and with the Catholic faith, as the Pope himself remarks in his "lectio" in Regensburg:

In all honesty, one must observe that in the late Middle Ages we find trends in theology which would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit. In contrast with the so-called intellectu-

alism of Augustine and Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which ultimately led to the claim that we can only know God's "*voluntas ordinata*". Beyond this is the realm of God's freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise to positions which clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God's transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions.

Here Ratzinger is not speaking as an engaged theologian—as many have maintained—in illustrating reckless and audacious theological positions that may be as authoritative as one pleases, but which nevertheless personal; it is, rather, Pope Benedict XVI, who judiciously does nothing but restate the consolidated positions of Catholic doctrine, which are enunciated in terms identical to those of John Paul II in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* in 1998. This text proclaims the universal value of certain rationally knowable and applicable principles, including the principle of non-contradiction: this is a principle that is universal—transcendental, as the philosophers would say—precisely because not even God can violate it:

Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an *implicit philosophy*, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, *orthós logos*, *recta ratio* (*Fides et Ratio*, 4).

No less clear and eloquent is this passage from the dogmatic constitution on the Catholic faith from the First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius* (IV, DS 3017), cited with clear approval in *Fides et Ratio* in paragraph 53:

Even if faith is superior to reason there can never be a true divergence between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals the mysteries and bestows the gift of faith has also placed in the human spirit the light of reason. This God could not deny himself, nor could the truth ever contradict the truth.

The magisterium therefore teaches that God cannot exercise his own freedom in a contradictory way; that is, totally disconnected from the principles of reason: he does not submit himself to these by an arbitrary decree, but because he himself is the non-contradictory foundation of everything that exists. A God who could violate the principle of non-contradiction—such as being, when and if he wishes, indifferently both love and its lack, a merciful creator and a sadistic and brutal butcher, who issues a commandment and can then punish and damn at his discretion those obey his command—this God would be an incomprehensible sphinx, fickle and potentially an enemy of man. He would be a dangerous, omnipotent autocrat who, as the Pope stressed in Regensburg, “is not bound even by his own word”, because “nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God’s will, we would even have to practise idolatry”.

The God proclaimed by the Catholic Church is, on the other hand—and can be no other way—always and exclusively good, the giver of life and love; a redeemer and savior, and never a persecutor; a creator, and not a destroyer. He does not take pleasure from suffering or sin, but he can do nothing but place his creatures in the situation in which they can achieve their highest good. He is faithful and consistent—and cannot help but be so—in spite of the infidelity and inconsistency of human beings in the wearisome journey of individual existence and of history. He cannot be like this, because “God cannot contravene himself, nor can truth contradict truth”. God cannot be infinite love and also, contradictorily, a limited love that is fickle, intermittent, and opportunistic.

I am not overlooking the fact that much theology, including some

found in Catholic circles, is afraid of a God who could not ignore the principle of non-contradiction, positing that a God who could not get around this principle would not be omnipotent, and could not exercise his own love in a supremely free manner. But it is clear what the risks are if the magisterium would adopt the image of a God supremely free to act against reason. It is time to overcome the dead and sterile opposition between a God-Logos, who by adhering to the principle of non-contradiction closes himself up in an unassailable rationalistic detachment impermeable to love, and a God-Love, who can at will violate rational principles simply to reinforce his own nature of free love in an absolute and omnipotent manner.

As Benedict XVI teaches in Regensburg, “Not to act with *logos* is contrary to God’s nature. [...] God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos* has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf. Certainly, love ‘transcends’ knowledge and is thereby capable of perceiving more than thought alone (cf. *Eph* 3:19); nonetheless it continues to be love of the God who is ‘logos’. Consequently, Christian worship is, again to quote Paul— “λογική λατρεία”, worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason (cf. *Rom* 12:1)”. In short: God is love—*Deus caritas est!*—precisely in that He is Logos, and He is Logos precisely in that He is love.

Such is the God of the Catholic Church. So it does not seem to me that the Church can agree with Nayed when he asserts that “the contrast between Christianity and Islam on this basis is not only unfair, but also quite questionable”.

If the image of God in Islam conveyed by Nayed is correct—and I do not intend to address this question, nor to hazard myself in dangerous exercises of Qur’anic exegesis—if, that is, “God freely chooses, in his compassion toward his creatures, to act reasonably in consistency with himself”, and if “reason need not be above God, and externally normative to Him. It can be a grace of God that is normative because of God’s own free commitment to acting consistently with it”, then it must be distinctly emphasized that this image of God clashes with the one proclaimed as genuine by the Catholic Church, as the Pope theologian clearly explained in Regensburg.

CHAPTER 4



Our God and Your God is One

AREF ALI NAYED

IN RESPONSE TO MY COMMENTARY ON THE Lecture of Benedict XVI, Alessandro Martinetti wrote a series of comments under the title: “Unbridled Will or Logos? The God of Islam and the God of Christianity [*Arbitrio o Logos? Il Dio dell’islam e quello cristiano*]”. The following notes and extensive quotations constitute a response to some of the important points made by Martinetti.

In developing my notes, and in the hope of achieving mutual understanding, I shall invoke only such sources and arguments that would be deemed authoritative or normative by the Catholic Martinetti. I will strive to show that Martinetti’s own Catholic tradition supports, rather than opposes, a position similar to that of Ibn Hazm and other Muslim theologians as briefly outlined in my commentary.

Starting from the Qur’anic injunction to discuss matters with the people of the Book in the best possible way, and with the Prophetic injunction to speak to people in modes suitable for their ways of reasoning, I shall not appeal, in these notes, to the Qur’an, the Sunna, or the Islamic tradition, but to Martinetti’s own Christian and philosophic tradition. In my notes I shall strive toward the Qur’anically sought after “common discourse” (*kalimatun sawa*): common recognition of the One True God.

My guide in these notes is the following Qur’anic verse (29:46): “Do not argue with the People of the Book but in the best of ways, except with those who have been unjust, and say: ‘we believe in what has been revealed to us, and what has been revealed to you: our God and your God is One, and we are devoted to Him.’”

Of course, my own Ash‘ari position is rooted in God’s revelation in the Qur’an and the Sunna as understood and expounded by the Sunni scholars of the Ash‘ari school.

Martinetti’s main strategy is that of undermining my claim that it is unfair and questionable to contrast a purported rational God of Christianity with a purported irrational and whimsical God of Islam.

Martinetti, as is suggested by the title of his comments, counter-claims that the “God of Christianity” contrasts with the “God of Islam”. The God of Christianity is supposedly a “God of *logos*”, and the God of Islam is supposedly a “God of will”. The aim of my notes is to collapse this false distinction, using Martinetti’s own traditional sources, and to show that his contrast between two different Gods, a rational and a whimsical one, reaffirms yet another polarity in the dubious “contrast tables” discredited in my commentary.

Martinetti basically uses passages in which I tried to briefly make sense of Ibn Hazm’s position in order to prove that I am putting forth an irrational whimsical God, which he then contrasts with his rational God.

Martinetti is also keen to undermine my claim that the Catholic tradition itself, and especially Thomas Aquinas, does not support the elevation of reason above God.

He counter-claims that God cannot but respect and act according to the rules of reason, including the “principle of non-contradiction”. Martinetti believes that Aquinas, the Catholic tradition (he especially cites *Fides et Ratio*), and Benedict XVI, all share that counter-claim.

My strategy in these notes consists in two moves: 1) strive to show Martinetti that Catholic normative doctrines and documents clearly state that the God of the Muslims and that of the Christians is the very same God, and that his false contrast between “our God” and “your God” is not only unfair, but constitutes a rejection of authoritative (for him) Catholic teachings in this regard; and 2) strive to show Martinetti that Thomas Aquinas, based on Biblical grounds, does not elevate Reason above God, and that he, on the contrary, holds views that are very close to Ibn Hazm and Ash‘ari Muslim theologians. *Fides et Ratio* can also be shown to be in a continuous line with a more accurate reading of Aquinas and close to Ash‘ari teachings on faith and reason.

It is hoped that my notes will make clear to Martinetti that there is no need to appeal to a normative transcendental reason, above God, for Muslims to be rational, or for our God to be considered rational. It is hoped that Martinetti will ultimately see that our God is One!

Move I: Catholic normative teachings regarding the worship of the One God in Islam and Christianity

Martinetti, by taking *Fides et Ratio* as authoritative, signals that he is a devout Catholic who should equally uphold, as Pope John Paul II always did, and as Pope Benedict XVI still does, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (*italics have been added for emphasis*):

Nostra Aetate:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. *They adore the one God*, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.¹

The reaffirmations and clarifications of *Nostra Aetate* by Pope John Paul II:

Christians and Muslims, we have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world, marked by many signs of hope, but also by multiple signs of anguish. For us, Abraham is a very model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. *We believe in the same God, the one God*, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection.²

As I have often said in other meetings with Muslims, *your God and ours is one and the same*, and we are brothers and sisters in the faith of Abraham. Thus it is natural that we have much to discuss concerning true holiness in obedience and worship to God.³

On other occasions I have spoken of the religious patrimony of Islam and of its spiritual values. The Catholic Church realizes that *the element of worship given to the one, living, subsistent, merciful and almighty Creator of heaven and earth is common to Islam and herself, and that it is a great link uniting all Christians and Muslims*. With great satisfaction she also notes, among other elements of Islam which are held in common, the honour attributed to Jesus Christ and his Virgin Mother.⁴

The recent reaffirmations of *Nostra Aetate* by Pope Benedict XVI:

The position of the Pope concerning Islam is *unequivocally that expressed by the conciliar document Nostra Aetate*.⁵

Martinetti's contrast between the God of Christianity and the God of Islam is in direct violation of the teachings of the last and most authoritative Vatican Council. Given his obvious devotion to Catholic doctrine, Martinetti must reconsider his position.

The Qur'an teaches Muslims to invite the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) to come to a common discourse and to affirm the worship of the One True God. The Second Vatican teaches Catholics to come to such a common discourse. It is sad to see a Catholic wanting to lapse to pre-Second Vatican ICouncil positions that were not conducive to mutual respect or co-living.

Move II: Thomas Aquinas is not on the side of Martinetti

Martinetti, without any documentation, claims that Aquinas would never concur with a position similar to the one I attributed to Ibn Hazm. While I am no Thomist, I dare bring the attention of Martinetti to the following facts:

1) *Aquinas affirms, just as most Muslim theologians do, that it is Revelation that is the ultimate and real teacher about God and His ways. Reason must strive to understand, but it is Revelation that saves:*

It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason. Firstly, indeed, because man is directed to God, as to *an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason*: 'The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee' (*Isaiah* 66:4). But the end must first be known by men who are to direct

their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence *it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation*. Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. *It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.*⁶

2) *Aquinas affirms, just as most Muslim theologians do, that God is omnipotent and that His Power and Will are utterly efficacious:*

God is bound to nobody but Himself. Hence, when it is said that God can only do what He ought, nothing else is meant by this than that God can do nothing but what is befitting to Himself, and just.

Although this order of things be restricted to what now exists, the divine power and wisdom are not thus restricted. Whence, although no other order would be suitable and good to the things which now are, yet God can do other things and impose upon them another order.

3) *Aquinas points out the common mistake of subjecting divine acts to natural necessity:*

In this matter certain persons erred in two ways. Some laid it down that God acts from natural necessity in such way that as from the action of nature nothing else can happen beyond what actually takes place—as, for instance, from the seed of man, a man must come, and from that of an olive, an olive; so from the divine operation there could not result other things, nor another order of things, than that which now is. But we showed above that *God does not act from natural necessity, but that His will is the cause of all things; nor is that will naturally and from any necessity determined to those things*. Whence in no way at all is the present course of events produced by God from any necessity, so that other things could not happen. Others, however, said that the divine power is restricted to this present course of events through the order of the divine

OUR GOD AND YOUR GOD IS ONE

wisdom and justice without which God does nothing. *But since the power of God, which is His essence, is nothing else but His wisdom*, it can indeed be fittingly said that there is nothing in the divine power which is not in the order of the divine wisdom; for the divine wisdom includes the whole potency of the divine power. Yet the order placed in creation by divine wisdom, in which order the notion of His justice consists, as said above, *is not so adequate to the divine wisdom that the divine wisdom should be restricted to this present order of things*. Now it is clear that the whole idea of order which a wise man puts into things made by him is taken from their end. So, when the end is proportionate to the things made for that end, the wisdom of the maker is restricted to some definite order. But the divine goodness is an end exceeding beyond all proportion things created. *Whence the divine wisdom is not so restricted to any particular order that no other course of events could happen. Wherefore we must simply say that God can do other things than those He has done.*

4) Aquinas explains why this mistake is often made:

In ourselves, in whom power and essence are distinct from will and intellect, and again intellect from wisdom, and will from justice, there can be something in the power which is not in the just will nor in the wise intellect. *But in God, power and essence, will and intellect, wisdom and justice, are one and the same. Whence, there can be nothing in the divine power which cannot also be in His just will or in His wise intellect.*

5) Aquinas does teach that objects that are impossible by their very definition cannot be done, but that we should still not say that God can not do them:

Whence, whatsoever has or can have the nature of being is numbered among the absolutely possible things, in respect of which God is called omnipotent. Now nothing is opposed to the idea of being except non-being. Therefore, *that which implies being and non-being at the same time is repugnant to the idea of an absolutely possible thing, within the scope of the divine omnipotence. For such cannot come under the divine omnipotence, not because of any defect in the power of God, but because it has not the nature of a feasible or possible thing.* Therefore, everything that does not imply a contradiction in terms, is numbered amongst those possible things, in respect of which God is called

omnipotent: whereas whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them. Nor is this contrary to the word of the angel, saying: “No word shall be impossible with God”. For whatever implies a contradiction cannot be a word, because no intellect can possibly conceive such a thing.⁷

It is noteworthy that Muslim Ash‘ari theologians, including Al-Ash‘ari himself, upheld a very similar doctrine to that outlined by Aquinas in this regard. The way to avoid what is often called the “paradox of omnipotence” is to hold that things such as “unmovable stones”, “squared circles” and “Euclidean triangles with angles adding up to more than 180 degrees” simply can not be. Thus, the question of whether or not an omnipotent God can make them should not even arise. God does not make such things not because of an externally imposed normative “law of non-contradiction” to which he must abide, but simply because such things, by definition, can not be. They do not have what it takes to be not because of a logical contradiction, but because of an ontological failure to be.

Many classical Muslim theologians who argued against the sensibility of the Christian doctrine of trinity used logic very similar to that of Aquinas, but added that the notion of the trinity itself “implies being and non-being at the same time [and] is repugnant to the idea of an absolutely possible thing, within the scope of the divine omnipotence”. “For whatever implies a contradiction cannot be a word, because no intellect can possibly conceive such a thing.” For many classical Muslim theologians, the idea of a “Man-God” was taken to be of the same category as the idea of a “squared circle”. Such ideas, as the phenomenologist Meinong rightly points out, can “subsist” and be referred to, talked about, and even believed in, but can not possibly “exist”.

Of course, despite the authority of Aquinas on things reasonable and logical, Aquinas himself, and the Catholic Church throughout its history, had to preserve a space for ultra-logics that do not fit neatly into the categories of human logics. That is the only way to preserve the authoritative (for them) teachings of Paul and other Christian sages on a “Wisdom of God” that transcends the “Wisdom of the World”.

The appeal to such “extra-rationality” is very clear in the authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church. “Fides et Ratio” itself has many passages defending precisely such a position not on the basis of “Reason” but on the basis of “Revelation”.

6) *“Fides et Ratio”, just as most Muslim theologians do, reaffirms the normativity of Revelation over Reason:*

Restating almost to the letter the teaching of the First Vatican Council’s constitution *Dei Filius*, and taking into account the principles set out by the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council’s constitution *Dei Verbum* pursued the age-old journey of understanding faith, reflecting on Revelation in the light of the teaching of Scripture and of the entire Patristic tradition. At the First Vatican Council, the Fathers had stressed the supernatural character of God’s Revelation. On the basis of mistaken and very widespread assertions, the rationalist critique of the time attacked faith and denied the possibility of any knowledge which was not the fruit of reason’s natural capacities. This obliged the Council to reaffirm emphatically that there exists a knowledge which is peculiar to faith, surpassing the knowledge proper to human reason, which nevertheless by its nature can discover the Creator. This knowledge expresses a truth based upon the very fact of God who reveals himself, a truth which is most certain, since God neither deceives nor wishes to deceive.⁸

7) *Fides et Ratio reaffirms that Divine Will can overcome human “habitual patterns of thought”, and that it is not bound by human logic and systems:*

This is why the Christian’s relationship to philosophy requires thorough-going discernment. In the New Testament, especially in the Letters of Saint Paul, one thing emerges with great clarity: the opposition between “the wisdom of this world” and the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The depth of revealed wisdom disrupts the cycle of our habitual patterns of thought, which are in no way able to express that wisdom in its fullness.

The beginning of the First Letter to the Corinthians poses the dilemma in a radical way. The crucified Son of God is the historic event upon which every attempt of the mind to construct an adequate explanation of the meaning of existence upon merely human argumentation comes to grief. The true key-point, which challenges every philosophy,

is Jesus Christ's death on the Cross. It is here that every attempt to reduce the Father's saving plan to purely human logic is doomed to failure. "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the learned? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 *Corinthians* 1:20), the Apostle asks emphatically. The wisdom of the wise is no longer enough for what God wants to accomplish; what is required is a decisive step towards welcoming something radically new: 'God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise ...; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are' (1 *Corinthians* 1:27–28). Human wisdom refuses to see in its own weakness the possibility of its strength; yet Saint Paul is quick to affirm: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 *Corinthians* 12:10). Man cannot grasp how death could be the source of life and love; yet to reveal the mystery of his saving plan God has chosen precisely that which reason considers "foolishness" and a "scandal".

The wisdom of the Cross, therefore, breaks free of all cultural limitations which seek to contain it and insists upon an openness to the universality of the truth which it bears. What a challenge this is to our reason, and how great the gain for reason if it yields to this wisdom! Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being's ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and, with the assistance of faith, it is capable of accepting the "foolishness" of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising.⁹

Of course, based on what we take to be God's own and final Qur'anic revelation of the truth regarding Jesus (peace be upon him), we Muslims accept God's judgment that it is not "befitting" to God to have a son or become human. Thus most Muslim theologians deny the doctrines of the incarnation and crucifixion not only on the basis of the philosophical logic concerning impossible objects (as briefly outlined above), but on the basis of divine revelation (or revealed divine logic) that Muslims solemnly hold authentic and true.

Despite the fact that a Muslim, based on the ultimate revelatory authority he or she accepts, must reject the contents of the particular example claimed by *Fides et Ratio* to be a willful rupture of the rules of human reason, the example itself does establish that Catholicism, like Islam, does elevate the freedom and will of God over any limits

on them by any external human or transcendental "Reason". Does that make Catholic teaching irrational, or the Catholic God an irrational God?

One person's extra-rationality is often another person's irrationality! It all depends on one's ultimate criterion. For us Muslims that ultimate criterion (*al-furqan*) on the doctrine of God, is the Qur'an and the Sunna. It is pointless, however, for Christians and Muslims to exchange accusations of irrationality based on their contrasting communal experiences of what they take to be extra-rational ruptures of the divine into history. Such a mutually destructive polemical exchange will only satisfy atheistic secularists who think that religiosity as such is fundamentally irrational. Muslims and Christians must cooperate in staking a place for the extra-rational in a world increasingly dominated by a godless secularist outlook. As pointed out in the beginning of my commentary, Benedict XVI's just call for an expansion of the notion of Reason so as to accommodate revelatory insights is something that both Christians and Muslims can positively respond to.

Furthermore, having different authoritative revelatory criteria for the doctrine of God does not necessarily mean that we have different Gods. Here it is useful to invoke the important distinction, made by the logician Frege, between "sense" and "reference". In talking of God, He is our common "reference", and we are all referring to the very same God. However, in talking of God, we, of course, have different "senses" or ways of understanding and referring to Him (senses and ways that are deeply rooted in our different revelatory traditions and communal experiences).

Perhaps this distinction can help Martinetti see that it is possible for a Muslim and a Christian to worship and talk about the same God, while at the same time solemnly upholding different, and even opposing, senses of Him.

In some areas, as in the upholding of the sovereign Will of God, it is possible for Muslim and Christian theological senses to come very close to each other, in addition to sharing the same reference. In other areas, as in Trinitarian versus Unitarian doctrines, Christian and Muslim theological senses are in clear opposition. Despite such opposition, we must not fall into the temptation of scoffing at, or dismissing, each

other. We must, together, keep our hearts and minds focused on Him who is our common reference, and continue to engage each other in a prayerfull, reasoned, and peaceful dialectical discussion.

Part of the task of inter-religious dialogue is to invoke the unity of reference in order to make room for the exploration of the diversity of senses. Such exploration can enhance our understandings of the different, and even oppositional senses, we have of the divine. Our own different senses of the divine become clearer as we engage each other in sincere and devout discussion regarding the One God. This is why I am so grateful for Martinetti's comments. I sincerely hope our discussion will continue.

8) *The biblical basis for the affirmation of the sovereignty of the will of God*

The above teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the will of God are not at all surprising. The Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, is full of repeated affirmations of the total sovereignty of the will of God. The following passage of Paul (*Romans* 9:14–26) suffices as an illustration:

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? May it never be! For he said to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion". So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth". So then, he has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires. You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed ask him who formed it: "Why did you make me like this?" Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? As he says also in Hosea: "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, who was

OUR GOD AND YOUR GOD IS ONE

not beloved. It will be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called children of the living God”.

It is a simple fact that the God of the Bible, just as the God of the Qur’an, cannot be made to fit within the bounds and designs of the human logics of the philosophers (not even within the great logic of Aristotle so revered in both of our traditions by Aquinas and al-Ghazali). It is important to remember the famous words of Pascal in his *Pensées*:

The God of Christians is not a God who is simply the author of mathematical truths, or of the order of the elements; that is the view of heathens and Epicureans ... But the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Christians, is a God of love and of comfort, a God who fills the soul and heart of those whom He possesses, a God who makes them conscious of their inward wretchedness, and His infinite mercy, who unites Himself to their inmost soul, who fills it with humility and joy, with confidence and love, who renders them incapable of any other end than Himself.¹⁰

In one’s apologetic efforts to make room for theology and religion amidst their contemporary secular “cultured despisers”, one must remember the important stark difference so rightly pointed out by Pascal: “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob / Not of the philosophers and intellectuals / Certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace!”

If being rational and having a rational God means adopting the God of the philosophers, be it called “Reason” or “Logos”, most Muslim theologians would simply opt to pass! That is why Ash‘ari theologians, while always upholding the importance of devout reasoning that is guided by revelation, never accepted the Hellenistic philosophical worship of “Logos” or the “Active Intellect”.

Islam’s devout insistence on the sovereignty of the living God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all) must not be cheaply turned against it, with unfair accusations of whimsical irrationality! If properly appreciated, such devout Muslim insistence can be a real aid to Christian affirmations of the divine in the face of the atheistically secular.

Let us help each other by overcoming our false “contrast tables”,

and by praying for peace and guidance from the One beloved God of all.

God truly knows best!

NOTES

¹ *Nostra Aetate*, “Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions”. Proclaimed by Paul VI, 28 October, 1965.

² “Address of John Paul II to Young Muslims”, Morocco, 19 August, 1985.

³ “Address of John Paul II to the Participants in the Colloquium on ‘Holiness in Christianity and Islam’”, 9 May, 1985.

⁴ “Meeting of John Paul II with the Muslim Leaders”, Nairobi, Kenya, 7 May, 1980.

⁵ “Statement by Card. Tarcisio Bertone Secretary of State”, September 16, 2006.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947). First Part, Questions 1–119.

⁷ This and other passages are all from the chapter on the “Power of God” in Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*.

⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 23.

¹⁰ B. Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1958).

CHAPTER 5



God Does Not Violate the First and Universal Principles of Being

ALESSANDRO MARTINETTI

I EXPRESS SINCERE GRATITUDE to Aref Ali Nayed for paying thoughtful attention to my brief notes, dedicating a reply to it entitled “Our God and Your God is One.”

In order to respond adequately to the invitation to an exchange, and in order to provide a properly documented response to the writings of my esteemed interlocutor, I have prepared a rather long text in which, as required by an exchange that is frank and respectful of differences, I seek to elaborate the reasons for my fundamental disagreement with many of the positions supported by Nayed.

To begin, I maintain that it is necessary to clarify what truly seemed clear to me already in my first text; that is, that I do not support any thesis other than the following: God is omnipotent, and he cannot violate the principle of non-contradiction; the impossibility of violating this principle does not undermine his omnipotence, nor does it limit his sovereign freedom. That this is the thesis in question can be gathered, for example, from the following extract:

A God who could violate the principle of non-contradiction—such as being, when and if he wishes, indifferently both love and its lack, a merciful creator and a sadistic and brutal butcher, who issues a commandment and can then punish and damn at his discretion those who obey his command—this God would be an incomprehensible sphinx, fickle and potentially an enemy of man.

I am not overlooking the fact that much theology, including some found in Catholic circles, is afraid of a God who could not ignore the

principle of non-contradiction, positing that a God who could not get around this principle would not be omnipotent, and could not exercise his own love in a supremely free manner.

1) Thomas Aquinas maintains that God *cannot* violate the principle of non-contradiction

I therefore reiterate the thesis: God is omnipotent, and cannot violate the principle of non-contradiction (hereafter referred to as the PNC); the impossibility of violating the PNC does not undermine his omnipotence, nor does it limit his sovereign freedom. I also maintain that Thomas Aquinas agrees with this thesis.

Since an attentive reading of my exposition shows that this is the thesis, and no other, it must be emphasized that the first four points of the response in which Nayed seeks to refute my argument fall short of their mark. 1) “Aquinas affirms, as do the majority of Muslim theologians, that it is Revelation that is the ultimate and real authority regarding God and his ways”: that may be, but I have not denied it. I have not denied that 2) “Aquinas affirms, as do the majority of Muslim theologians, that God is omnipotent and that there is no limit on his power and will”; with the sole clarification that this unlimited scope does not mean that God’s omnipotence should fall into the absurd, or violate the PNC. Likewise I have not (third and fourth points) committed “the error of subjugating the divine acts to natural necessity”. I am therefore exempted from examining the supporting texts from Aquinas used by Nayed, because, as documented, they have no bearing on the thesis that I am defending.

Of undoubted pertinence for evaluating the validity of the thesis is the citation accompanying Nayed’s fifth point.

Let us examine in detail the text from Thomas adopted by Nayed (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 25, a. 3):

Hoc igitur repugnat rationi possibilis absoluti, quod subditur divinae omnipotentiae, quod implicat in se esse et non esse simul. Hoc enim omnipotentiae non subditur, non propter defectum divinae potentiae; sed quia non potest habere rationem factibilis neque possibilis. Quaecumque igitur contradictionem non implicant, sub illis possibilibus continentur, respectu quorum dicitur Deus omnipotens. Ea vero quae contradictionem implicant, sub divina omnipotentia non continentur, quia non pos-

GOD DOES NOT VIOLATE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

sunt habere possibilitatem rationem. Unde convenientius dicitur quod non possunt fieri, quam quod Deus non potest ea facere.

I will translate with commentary. To the constitution (the concept, meaning, nature: *ratio*) of the possible, understood in the absolute sense—meaning the possible as such—which is subjected to the divine omnipotence, that is repugnant which in itself implies being and not being at the same time (that is, *that which implies a violation of the PNC*). And this (that which in itself implies being and not being at the same time, or implies a violation of the PNC) is not subjected to omnipotence (*hoc enim omnipotentiae non subditur*), not because of a defect of the divine power (*non propter defectum divinae potentiae*), but precisely because it cannot enjoy the constitution of the feasible or possible. For this reason, everything that does not imply contradiction—everything that does not violate the PNC—(*Quaecumque igitur contradictionem non implicant*) belongs to the category of the possible, in relation to which it is said that God is omnipotent (*sub illis possibilitibus continentur, respectu quorum dicitur Deus omnipotens*). But that which implies contradiction (*quae contradictionem implicant*) is not subject to the divine omnipotence (*sub divina omnipotentia non continentur*) because it does not enjoy the constitution of the possible (it does not admit the qualification of possible: *non possunt habere possibilitatem rationem*). Thus things of this nature—which *imply contradiction* and *therefore* do not enjoy the constitution of possible things—are said to be incapable of being done, more precisely than if one were to say that God cannot do them (*Unde convenientius dicitur quod non possunt fieri, quam quod Deus non potest ea facere*).

Rather than stressing the fact that almighty God cannot do the impossible, it is intellectually instructive to emphasize that the divine *omni-potence* reigns over the *possible*, and therefore can freely dispose of things possible, making them be or not be. It cannot be claimed that the divine *omni-potence* disposes of the impossible, that it makes exist that which cannot possibly exist (and it is impossible that it should exist, because its existence would violate the PNC), which would make possible that which is intrinsically impossible, since the divine *omni-potence* does not claim any power over that which is not possible, and it is not possible not because the power of God is not great enough (omni-potent) to make it possible, but precisely because it is intrinsi-

cally impossible: if it were possible, it would violate the PNC, and it is in the impossibility that such a violation could take place that there lies the intrinsic impossibility that such an impossible thing could belong to the category of the possible.

What Thomas says in the text cited by Nayed thus confirms the thesis that I am defending, despite the contrary view of my esteemed opponent. Thomas says that what is contradictory (or that which implies contradiction, that which violates the PNC) cannot possibly exist, and that therefore *it is not possible* that *almighty* God could bring it into being, making exist that which cannot be (it cannot be in that if it existed it would violate the PNC). To summarize: God is omnipotent, and this omnipotence is not compromised by the fact that he cannot violate the PNC, meaning that he cannot do anything that is contradictory, cannot bring into being that which cannot be (in that it would be contradictory for it to exist), cannot make possible that which is impossible. *What else is Thomas asserting, if not the thesis that the present writer is also supporting, and that is that* “God is omnipotent, and he cannot violate the principle of non-contradiction; the impossibility of violating this principle does not undermine his omnipotence, nor does it limit his sovereign freedom”?

Another text from Thomas is also important (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 25, a. 4):

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, sub omnipotentia Dei non cadit aliquid quod contradictionem implicat. Praeterita autem non fuisse, contradictionem implicat ... Unde praeterita non fuisse, non subiacet divinae potentiae. Et hoc est quod Augustinus dicit, contra Faustum, quisquis ita dicit, si Deus omnipotens est, faciat ut quae facta sunt, facta non fuerint, non videt hoc se dicere, si Deus omnipotens est, faciat ut ea quae vera sunt, eo ipso quod vera sunt, falsa sint.

So then, here Thomas states in clear terms that, *as stated previously (sicut supra dictum est)*, it is not in the power of the divine omnipotence to do that which implies contradiction (*sub omnipotentia Dei non cadit aliquid quod contradictionem implicat*). For example, that things in the past did not happen (*praeterita non fuisse*) implies a contradiction, and therefore (that is, precisely insofar as it would involve a violation of the PNC) *it is not subject* to the divine power (*non subi-*

acet divinae potentiae). And Thomas adds, citing the Augustine of *Contra Faustum*: “Anyone who says, ‘if God is omnipotent, let him make it so that the things that have happened have not happened’, does not realize that he is saying, ‘God, if he is omnipotent, should make true things, by the very fact that they are true, to be false’” (*Et hoc est quod Augustinus dicit, contra Faustum, quisquis ita dicit, si Deus omnipotens est, faciat ut quae facta sunt, facta non fuerint, non videt hoc se dicere, si Deus omnipotens est, faciat ut ea quae vera sunt, eo ipso quod vera sunt, falsa sint*).

The thesis I have expressed is therefore reiterated with the authoritative endorsement of Thomas. Or rather, as is evident, it is I who am “borrowing” the thought of Thomas. For more supporting documentation, one should consider this other text from Aquinas (*Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, q. 1, a. 3):

Sic ergo aliquid dicitur impossibile fieri tribus modis [...]; tertio modo propter hoc quod id quod dicitur impossibile fieri, non potest esse terminus actionis [...]. Sed id quod tertio modo dicitur impossibile, Deus facere non potest [...] Et ideo non potest facere quod affirmatio et negatio sint simul vera, nec aliquod eorum in quibus hoc impossibile includitur. Nec hoc dicitur non posse facere propter defectum suae potentiae: sed propter defectum possibilis, quod a ratione possibilis deficit; propter quod dicitur a quibusdam quod Deus potest facere, sed non potest fieri.

I will translate with commentary. There are three different meanings to the statement that something is impossible to be done. The third of these meanings is that something cannot be done because it cannot be the result of an action (*tertio modo propter hoc quod id quod dicitur impossibile fieri, non potest esse terminus actionis*). God cannot do that which is said to be impossible according to this third meaning (*id quod tertio modo dicitur impossibile, Deus facere non potest*). For this reason, God cannot make affirmation and negation to be true at the same time, nor can he do any of those things in which an impossibility of this kind is included (*Et ideo non potest facere quod affirmatio et negatio sint simul vera, nec aliquod eorum in quibus hoc impossibile includitur*). And it is not said that God cannot do this because of a lack of power (omnipotence), but because of a lack in the thing possible, which fails to attain the very constitution of the possible

(*Nec hoc dicitur non posse facere propter defectum suae potentiae: sed propter defectum possibilis, quod a ratione possibilis deficit*); for this reason, some say that God can do it (because he is omnipotent) but that it cannot be done (given the nature of the possible, which cannot violate the PNC): *propter quod dicitur a quibusdam quod Deus potest facere, sed non potest fieri*. On this occasion as well, Thomas shows that God cannot do that which is contradictory, and that the impossibility of violating the PNC does not eliminate his omnipotence, because it is not up to God to make possible (and therefore subject to his omnipotence) that which, insofar as it implies contradiction, is intrinsically non-possible, neither enjoying nor able to enjoy the constitution of something possible.

Ad abundantiam, I add these other texts from Aquinas, the contents of which dovetail with those of the texts already taken into consideration:

Summa contra Gentiles, lib. 1, cap. 84: “*In divinam igitur voluntatem non possunt cadere quae secundum se sunt impossibilia*”: the divine will does not exercise its power over things that are impossible in themselves. And what is impossible in itself? In the first place, that which implies contradiction. In the same passage of *Contra Gentiles*, in fact, it states: “*Non potest igitur Deus velle aliquid quod repugnat rationi entis inquantum huiusmodi. Sicut autem rationi hominis inquantum est homo repugnat esse irrationale, ita rationi entis inquantum huiusmodi repugnat quod aliquid sit simul ens et non ens. Non potest igitur Deus velle quod affirmatio et negatio sint simul verae. Hoc autem includitur in omni per se impossibili, quod ad seipsum repugnantiam habet inquantum contradictionem implicat. Voluntas igitur Dei non potest esse per se impossibile*” (“God cannot will something that is repugnant to the constitution (the nature, the concept, the meaning: *ratio*) of being as such. Just as, in fact, being irrational is repugnant to the constitution of man as such, so also it is repugnant to the constitution of being as such for something to both be and not be at the same time. Therefore *God cannot will that affirmation and negation should be true at the same time*. It is, in fact, in the nature of everything that is impossible in itself to have an incompatibility with itself, in that it implies contradiction. For this reason *God cannot will things that are impossible in themselves*”).

Quaestiones disputatae de potentia, q. 1, a. 7 (but one should read the entire *quaestio*): “*Ea vero quae contradictionem implicant Deus non potest; quae quidem sunt impossibilia secundum se. Relinquitur ergo quod Dei potentia ad ea se extendat quae sunt possibilia secundum se. Haec autem sunt quae contradictionem non implicant. Constat ergo quod Deus ideo dicitur omnipotens quia potest omnia quae sunt possibilia secundum se*” (“God cannot do those things which imply contradiction; these, in fact, are impossible in themselves. It therefore follows that the power of God extends to things that are possible in themselves. And these things are those which do not imply contradiction. It therefore follows that God is said to be omnipotent because he can do all things that are possible in themselves”).

Summa contra Gentiles, lib. 2, cap. 25: “*Oppositum autem entis est non ens. Hoc igitur Deus non potest, ut faciat simul unum et idem esse et non esse: quod est contradictoria esse simul*” (“The opposite of being is non-being. For this reason God cannot make the same thing both be and not be at the same time, meaning that contradictories would exist at the same time”).

One should also compare what follows chapter 25. I will not present the entire text, but the salient passages. “*Unde eiusdem rationis etiam est quod Deus non possit facere opposita simul inesse eidem secundum idem*” (“It follows for the same reason that God cannot make it such that opposites should coexist at the same time and under the same aspect in the same thing”); “*Si igitur Deus non potest facere rem simul esse et non esse, nec etiam potest facere quod rei desit aliquod suorum principiorum essentialium ipsa remanente: sicut quod homo non habeat animam*” (“If, then, God cannot make a thing both be and not be at the same time, neither can he make a thing lack any of its essential principles and continue existing nonetheless: for example, God cannot make it such that a man would lack his soul”); “*Cum principia quarundam scientiarum, ut logicae, geometriae et arithmeticae, sumantur ex solis principiis formalibus rerum, ex quibus essentia rei dependet, sequitur quod contraria horum principiorum Deus facere non possit: sicut quod genus non sit praedicabile de specie; vel quod lineae ductae a centro ad circumferentiam non sint aequales; aut quod triangulus rectilineus non habeat tres angulos aequales duobus rectis*” (“Because the principles of some sciences, such as logic, geometry, and

mathematics, are taken from only the formal principles of things, upon which the essence of the thing depends, it follows that God *cannot* do things contrary to these principles: for example, that the genus should not be predicable from the species; or that the lines drawn from the center to the circumference should not be equal; or that a triangle should not have internal angles equal to two right angles"); "*patet quod Deus non potest facere quod praeteritum non fuerit. Nam hoc etiam contradictionem includit: eiusdem namque necessitatis est aliquid esse dum est, et aliquid fuisse dum fuit*" ("it is clear that God *cannot* make it such that the past does not exist. In fact, this also involves a contradiction: for this reason, it is equally necessary that something should be as long as it is, and that something should have been as long as it has been"); "*Sunt etiam quaedam quae repugnant rationi entis facti inquantum huiusmodi. Quae etiam Deus facere non potest: nam omne quod facit Deus, oportet esse factum*" ("There are also some things that are repugnant to the constitution of a created being precisely in that it is a created being. And God *cannot* do these things; in fact, whatever that God does, it is necessary that it be something actual"). "*Ex hoc autem patet quod Deus non potest facere Deum. Nam de ratione entis facti est quod esse suum ex alia causa dependeat. Quod est contra rationem eius quod dicitur Deus, ut ex superioribus patet*" ("It is also clear from this that God *cannot* make God. In fact, it belongs to the constitution of a created being that its being depends on a cause other than itself. And that is contrary to the constitution of the one we call God, as is evident from what has been stated above"); "*Eadem etiam ratione, non potest Deus facere aliquid aequale sibi. Nam illud cuius esse ab alio non dependet, potius est in essendo et in ceteris dignitatibus eo quod ab alio dependet, quod ad rationem entis facti pertinet*" ("For the same reason, God *cannot* make something equal to himself. In fact, that which does not depend on another for its being is superior in being and in the other qualities to that which depends on another, and depending on another is part of the nature of a created being"); "*Similiter etiam Deus facere non potest quod aliquid conservetur in esse sine ipso. Nam conservatio esse uniuscuiusque dependet a causa sua. Unde oportet quod, remota causa, removeatur effectus. Si igitur res aliqua posset esse quae a Deo non conservaretur in esse, non esset effectus eius*" ("Similarly, God *cannot* make

something that could continue existing without God himself. In fact, the preservation of anything depends on its cause. For this reason it is necessary that, once the cause is removed, the effect should be removed as well. Therefore if there could be anything not kept in existence by God, it would not be a thing made by God"); "*Quia ipse est per voluntatem agens, illa non potest facere quae non potest velle*" ("Because God acts according to his own will, he *cannot* do things that he *cannot* will"); "*non potest Deus facere se non esse, vel non esse bonum aut beatum: quia de necessitate vult se esse, bonum esse et beatum*" ("God *cannot* make himself cease to be, or cease to be good and happy: because by necessity he wills to be, and to be good and happy"); "*Deus non potest velle aliquod malum. Unde patet quod Deus peccare non potest*" ("God *cannot* will anything evil. From this it is evident that God cannot sin"); "*Dei voluntas non potest esse mutabilis. Sic igitur non potest facere id quod est a se volitum, non impleri*" ("The will of God *cannot* be changeable. Therefore he cannot make it such that what he wills should not be fulfilled").

Quaestiones de quolibet XII, q. 2, a. 1, where Thomas answers the question "if God could make contradictories to exist at the same time" ("*Utrum Deus possit facere contradictoria simul esse*"): "*dicendum, quod non: et hoc non importat in Deo imperfectionem potentiae, sed quia hoc non habet rationem possibilis*" ("it must be said that this is not possible: and *this does not entail an imperfection of power in God, but is due to the fact that it is not in keeping with the nature of the possible that contradictories should exist at the same time*").

To close this section, it is worth repeating that the thought of Thomas clearly emerges from the texts considered: God is omnipotent, and he cannot violate the PNC. This is what, invoking support from the authority of Thomas, I asserted in the previous text. And which, after analyzing the texts by Thomas, I feel able to confirm.

2) Defense of the PNC, logical, and ontological

Nayed writes:

The way to avoid what is often called "the paradox of omnipotence" is to maintain firmly that things such as "unmovable stones", "square circles", and "Euclidean triangles the sum of whose internal angles is larger than 180 degrees" simply cannot exist. For this reason, the question of

whether an omnipotent God can or cannot make these things should not even arise.

But why shouldn't the question be raised? Thomas raises it and examines it masterfully, dedicating focused and thoughtful attention to it, as documented by Nayed himself and by the present writer, and arguing in favor of a view of the divine omnipotence that does not conflict and *cannot in any way* conflict with the PNC.

In commenting on Thomas and in his later remarks, Nayed takes pains to indicate a presumed contrast between the logical PNC and the ontological PNC, a contrast with which Thomas supposedly agrees and which could be used against the thesis that I am advocating. Here is how the presumed contrast is presented:

God does not make such things not because of an externally imposed normative "law of non-contradiction", to which he must abide, but simply because such things, by definition, cannot be. They do not have what it takes to be not because of a logical contradiction, but because of an ontological failure to be.

It seems to me that what is at work here is an ineffective attempt to split the logical and ontological PNC. In fact, Nayed affirms that it is not a *logical* contradiction that prevents something from being, but only an ontological obstacle, an intrinsic *ontological* incapacity. But in this regard, it must be clarified 1) that (as Thomas clearly explains in the texts cited) the ontological obstacle that makes it impossible for a thing to exist is the violation of the *ontological* PNC that would take place if the thing, which intrinsically (ontologically) has no possibility of existing, were to exist; 2) that the *logical* PNC is not something juxtaposed to the ontological PNC, such that it could be divided from it, but is nothing other than the law by which human thought expresses that ontological PNC which the mind does not select arbitrarily, but discovers in things and simply acknowledges. The *ontological* PNC is a law intrinsic to things and evident to the mind, which, in the *logical* enunciation of the PNC, does nothing but expressly formulate this same ontological PNC. For this reason, the infraction of the logical PNC is nothing other than the manifestation to the mind of the violation of the ontological PNC. The logical formulation of the PNC assumes the task of indicating that "ontological inability to exist" of

which Nayed speaks. Thus, maintaining, as Nayed does, that those things which “simply ... cannot exist ... have what it takes to be not because of a logical contradiction, but because of an ontological failure to be” means not realizing that the logical PNC does nothing but point out that there is the “inability” to exist, the ontological obstacle (residing, as has been seen, in the *ontological* contradiction that would be perpetrated if something that cannot exist were to exist). Because the ontological obstacle is there—as Nayed concedes—and the logical PNC plays no other role than that of pointing out that obstacle, maintaining—as Nayed does—that even if the logical PNC were violated, the ontological obstacle would remain (maintaining that it is not the logical PNC that prevents something from being possible, but only an ontological obstacle, an ontological inability), means not realizing that the PNC plays no other role than that of making that ontological obstacle visible. This means that denying the logical PNC that reveals that there is an obstacle amounts to 1) refusing to see that the obstacle is there; 2) presuming that it is not there. But Nayed sees that the obstacle is there, and for this reason he cannot consistently maintain—as in fact he does—that the obstacle would exist independently of whether or not the *logical* PNC were observed. As has been illustrated, if one exempts oneself from logical contradiction, assenting to the violation of the logical PNC, one must realize that the corollary of this operation is the impossibility of consistently maintaining that there is an ontological obstacle, since, as has been highlighted, the *logic* of non-contradiction performs exclusively the task of pointing out the obstacle, and therefore departing from the logic of non-contradiction means making oneself unable to point out that the ontological obstacle exists, and with this, in fact, denying that the ontological obstacle can exist. In summary: exempting oneself from logical contradiction by asserting that *independently* from this contradiction there exists an insurmountable ontological obstacle that something should exist means not realizing that, once logical non-contradiction has been circumvented, the ontological obstacle has also been surmounted (that is, the ontological PNC has also been circumvented): the logical and ontological PNC stand or fall together.

After objecting *ad hominem*, I will dwell for a little longer on this highly important topic. The ontological formulation of the PNC says

that it is impossible that something should have contradictory aspects at the same time and under the same aspect (for example, that something should be and not be at the same time, or that it should be white and not-white at the same time and under the same aspect): Aristotle said that “it is impossible that the same thing should simultaneously belong and not belong to the same thing under the same aspect” (*Metaphysics* IV 3, 1005 b 19–20). The logical formulation of the PNC says that it is impossible to speak truly if one affirms and denies at the same time and under the same aspect that something has contradictory attributes. The nexus that runs between the logical PNC and the ontological PNC is evident as soon as it is enunciated, it has already come to light, but it deserves closer inspection. What does the *logical* formulation of a principle mean? *Logic* has to do with thought, and thought is thought about being, a manifestation of being, of the *ontological*; the *logical*, therefore, cannot disregard the *ontological*, it does not exist except as a manifestation of being, as thought that thinks about being. An act of thought, for example an affirmation (“this apple is red”, “this apple is not a non-apple”), can only refer to something existing (in this case, the apple), it can only have an *ontological* reference, whatever the ontological region in which the reference may be situated. Evandro Agazzi writes in this regard: “The ‘type of reality’ to which the referent cited in the classical definition of truth [*veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei*, ‘truth is the correspondence/conformity of the intelligence with the thing’, with the *res*, which is the ‘referent’ Agazzi is discussing] belongs is not mentioned by the definition (a true statement can ‘concern’ physical or mathematical entities, God, characters in a novel, hopes and desires, etc.) and this indicates that the particular *ontological status* of the referents is not a precondition of truth, but the truth is *in any case* connected to some ontological reference. In this sense, we must affirm that the truth is always *ontologically involved*, and that the truth of an affirmation entails that its referent should exist, while leaving open the question about the ‘ontological region’ in which it is situated” (Evandro Agazzi, “Logica, verità e ontologia”, in *Le parole dell’Essere. Per Emanuele Severino* [Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2005] p.10). It is therefore clear once again that there is a mutual relationship, an inextricable bond, between the logical PNC and the ontological PNC. That thought which would

attempt to disregard the logical PNC could not help but attempt to disregard the ontological PNC as well, and could not help but be a mere abortive thought, a thought unable even to form itself, since the things (the beings, the onto-logical) of which thought is thought and without which thought would not even exist (and, as has been seen, thought cannot be anything but thought about *being*) can only exist in harmony with the PNC. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that an affirmation aimed at denying the PNC (such as an affirmation of the type: "there exists a non-circle circle") would be affected by falsity and also not affected by falsity: it would be, in other words, an affirmation that, in spite of the attempt to circumvent the PNC, would end up being governed by the PNC. In fact, to speak of an affirmation that is affected by falsity and also not affected by falsity is to say that the thought that carries out the affirmation is subject to the PNC, which stipulates precisely that something should not be "*a and not-a*": in this case, false and not-false. This comes as no surprise: thought is inscribed in the ontological order, and for this reason it must be subject to the structures (transcendental, meaning that their influence extends to all of existence) that substantiate and regulate all that is.

The attempt to separate the logical from the ontological, the logical PNC from the ontological PNC, is a maneuver typical of modern and contemporary philosophy, arising from the conviction that thought cannot understand how things are, but only how we see them. This conviction, which does not appear to be supported by a thoughtful and impartial critical spirit, is however afflicted with self-contradiction. It arbitrarily presupposes (without demonstrating the cogency of this presupposition) that things are different from the way in which we know them, that one cannot know things in themselves. It must be objected that those who presume not to know things as they are, but only as they appear, in order to grasp the difference between things as they are and things as they appear (the difference by virtue of which they affirm that they do not know things as they are, but only as they appear), must evidently know things as they are, and not only as they appear. But if they know things as they are, the thesis is falsified according to which things as they are cannot be known. If instead they do not know things as they are, it is impossible that they should possess any reliable information about the difference between things as

they are and things as they appear: so the presumption that there exist things that are not knowable as they are is a specious presumption. This demonstrates the self-contradiction of which I was speaking. In other words: if things do not appear to Harry as they are in themselves, or if things in themselves are beyond Harry's range of understanding, Harry cannot in any way know (precisely because they are beyond his range of understanding) that there exist things enjoying unknown properties different from the ones enjoyed by things as they appear to him, or the things within his range of understanding. Harry is a proponent of that epistemological dualism which denies the intentional identity of thought and being, and arbitrarily introduces between the two an unbridgeable difference by virtue of which being is held to be inaccessible to thought. One of the best rejections of this dualism, remaining in Italy, is the one made by Gustavo Bontadini, long a professor of theoretical philosophy at the Catholic University of Milan.

Harry, a theorist of the fracture between thought and being, between the logical and the ontological, reasons as follows: it may be granted that things, as they appear to us and as we can know them, cannot violate the PNC, but how can it be known if things in themselves (that is, as we are not able to know them) cannot violate the PNC? Harry's question, except for the inspiration behind it, can also be elaborated in other forms: could it not be that the principles that govern human thought (and the PNC first among them) are valid only within the boundaries of human understanding, such that presuming that they apply to everything that exists is applying with anthropocentric arrogance to that which exists laws that in reality are binding only for the narrow human capacity for understanding, is setting forth the claim that the world is made the way the limited principles of human thought are able to understand it? And again: could it not be that the progress of understanding will clarify that what today is considered an incontrovertible principle is in reality a map that is just adequately reliable for orienting oneself in the domain of the knowable, a map that the advance of understanding will require be modified extensively, possibly one day confirming its failure? And again: it may be that the evidence of the PNC is invincible, and that human thought cannot construct any strategy capable of discrediting it; but if even human thought is captivated by the PNC as by an incontrovertible law that is

so intrinsic and connatural to it as to prevent it from thinking about the existence of something that would violate the PNC, nonetheless why should the recognition of this principle as inescapable for human thought be an irresistible proof of the impossibility that things should be structured in opposition to the PNC? Why should the display of an insuperable law of human thought, invulnerable despite any attempt of human thought itself to subvert it, be considered a sufficient condition for demonstrating that an immanent impossibility for our thought is also an immanent impossibility for all things as they are in themselves? Apart from unmasking, as has been done, the unfounded dualistic presupposition that underlies Harry's position, one must respond by observing that hypothetical things violating the PNC and inhabiting worlds in which the PNC does not apply would be, hypothetically, things contrary to the PNC and also not contrary to the PNC. In fact, if they were things not contrary to the PNC, the hypothesis would fail, the objector would adhere to the affirmation of the universal (transcendental, meaning that it extends as far as being) validity of the PNC. If one intends to hold firm the hypothesis of the existence of things that violate the PNC, it is then necessary to maintain that they violate the PNC and that they also do not violate it (because, if they did not violate it, one would fall into the case just examined, and the very hypothesis of things violating the PNC would be dissolved). The objector, to construct his own hypothesis, is therefore obliged by the nature of his own hypothesis to hypothesize that the things that violate the PNC also do not violate the PNC. But, as has already been shown, the impossibility that something should be "*a* and also *not-a*" (in this case, that something should be "contrary to the PNC and also not contrary to the PNC") is *nothing other than the very impossibility of violating the PNC*, which asserts that something cannot be "*a* and *not-a*". Without a doubt, the hypothetical world in which the PNC were not in effect would be structured in conformity with the PNC, it would not at all be a world in which the PNC does not apply.

Another maneuver that is sometimes used to weaken the PNC is that of denying the "primacy" of the PNC, which means denying its status as a first principle, attributing to it a certain "secondariness". The attempt unfolds by seeking to demonstrate that the PNC can be

derived from a logical calculation: this process of making it any sort of derivation would compromise, as already remarked, the primary status of the principle, it would confer upon it a “secondariness” that would undermine its transcendental significance. But any kind of logical calculation that might be constructed to demonstrate that the evidence of the PNC is derived can only be based on rules of reasoning which could not even constitute themselves if they did not rely on the patency and cogency of the PNC, if they were not dependent on it: this rule is not that other rule, it prescribes this and not that; this logical symbol is not that other, it stands for this and not for that, and so on. For this reason, any calculation, developed within any sort of logic, that might aspire to obtain, to *derive* the evidence of the PNC (thereby deposing it from the rank of first, underivable, undemonstrable, anapodeictic evidence) unavoidably runs into a *petitio principii*: that is, it sustains itself by virtue of the efficacy of the principle whose efficacy the calculation is intended to establish (on this aspect of the problem, and in general on the topic of the correct understanding of the PNC, the study of Paolo Pagani is instructive: *Contraddizione performativa e ontologia* [Milan, 1999]).

Some clarifications need to be made. Asserting that things are known as they are does not necessarily mean that things are known in an exhaustive way, or that everything about a thing is known, or all of its attributes, but it means that what is known about a thing (as little or as much as that may be) is an authentic characteristic of the thing, and not only our way of seeing the thing, a characteristic that we assign to the thing but that does not really belong to it. For example, I can be unaware of whether an automobile is white or not white (that is, I can have a less than exhaustive understanding of the automobile), but if I do not indulge in a misguided epistemological dualism, I must acknowledge that an automobile has a color (and I am not the one who attributes to it a color that is not really its own), and that it is white or not white. Furthermore, if I know that it is not white, it is not a given that I know that it is green or black: the PNC tells me in an incontrovertible way that, if it is not white, it cannot be white, but it leaves open a semantic field that extends to all that is not-white, within which lies the color of my automobile. Moreover, the PNC is not a guarantee against error: if I know that this stone does not weigh

one pound, and if I honor the PNC, I cannot fall into the error of thinking that it weighs one pound, but I am not shielded from the error of thinking that it weighs two pounds when it actually weighs three pounds. As can be seen, opposing epistemological dualism and defending the PNC does not mean flirting carelessly with a conception of human knowledge as something unlimited and infallible. Man knows that everything that is, whatever and however it may be, cannot be contradictory. Knowing this does not mean knowing without any trace of ignorance or any possibility of error all that exists. The PNC does not mean that there are not things of which man is unaware, characterized by properties of which man is unaware. Affirming the transcendental significance of the PNC does not eliminate the often unforeseeable and extensive range of differences and of the endless richness and variegated multiplicity of that which is, and which for the most part is unknown to men: it only takes note of the fact that this range and this richness could not even exist if they violated the PNC (logical and ontological, as is already clear).

I maintain that the examination conducted, which should certainly be extended and refined, demonstrates that (wherever it has disappeared) there should be a recovery of the awareness of the intimate interdependence and co-penetration of the logical and ontological PNC proclaimed by classical philosophical thought, and paradigmatically illustrated by Aristotle in the book *Gamma* of the *Metaphysics*, in which the PNC is correctly defended against its objectors, demonstrating that *those who deny the PNC, in the very act of denying it, cannot help but use the PNC that they deny in words*. The PNC defended by Aristotle is precisely the PNC in which logical and ontological are inseparable, above any separation of thought and being, and that is how it is for Thomas Aquinas, the astute commentator on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. This inseparability of the logical and ontological PNC can also be appreciated by considering it from the angle of the well-known classical conception of the truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, "correspondence/conformity between understanding and being" (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.16, a.1; *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, q.1, a.1). What is this correspondence if not precisely the capacity of thought to manifest being, the authentic manifestation of being in thought? Once again, we are brought back to the inseparable reciproc-

ity of the logical and ontological PNC. In this regard, Thomas pregnantly states that (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 3, ad 1) “*verum quod est in intellectu, convertitur cum ente, ut manifestativum cum manifestato*”. That is, truth lies in the intellect, in the understanding (*verum est in intellectu*), but it extends as far as the range of existence (that is how I translate “*convertitur cum ente*”), because understanding is nothing other than the manifestation of being which manifests itself in it (*ut manifestativum cum manifestato*). And again (*ibid*, q. 16, a. 3, *corpus*) “*Unumquodque autem in quantum habet de esse, intantum est cognoscibile. Et propter hoc dicitur in III de anima, quod anima est quodammodo omnia secundum sensum et intellectum*”. That is, any thing is more knowable to the extent that it has more being. What this means is that knowledge is all the more itself to the extent that it focuses on being and manifests it. And being is not outside the grasp of the understanding (it is not such a stranger to the understanding as to be unknowable, enjoying prerogatives completely hidden from the understanding, perhaps even the prerogative of being contradictory), such that Aristotle says in *De Anima* (*dicitur in III de anima*) that “*anima est quodammodo omnia*”, that the intellectual faculty is “in a certain way all things”, meaning that it exercises an unlimited range of activity, extending as far as the entire spectrum of being. As clarified above, this unlimited range of human intentionality cannot be confused with some sort of omniscience: human intelligence has all of existence in view, but sees it in the ways and within the limits inherent to its finite condition. Human ontic finiteness, the condition of being situated within a perspective, a point of view, nevertheless does not preclude transcendental openness (distinctly ontological, having all being as its domain of activity, and not merely ontic, as it would be if it could not exceed the boundaries of this or that other being), it does not prohibit that, *from that point of view*, what is under consideration is all of existence, above all by understanding the inescapable constants, meaning those transcendental properties among which non-contradiction is a rightful member.

There sometimes arises an objection of this kind: isn't a PNC that not even God can violate too powerful? Is God dethroned by the PNC, which, by dethroning him, enthrones itself? Who is the real God: our Lord, or the PNC?

I will sketch a few considerations in this regard. The PNC prohibits that anything at all should be contradictory. But in order for the PNC to have the opportunity to apply itself, something must exist. And it is not the PNC that establishes what exists and what it is like, but God. Does this table not exist? It is contradictory that it should also exist, but whether it exists or not depends on God and God alone. Certainly, if *a* exists it cannot not exist, but whether it exists or not depends solely and exclusively on God. In fact, the carpenter who makes the table depends on God. One might say: the carpenter is free to build the table or not. Certainly, but he is not free to give himself the freedom that God alone is free to give or not give. In summary: the PNC must have something to be applied to, and that to which it is applied either is God or is not. That which is not God depends upon God, as has been stated, such that the PNC, needing that which is not God in order to exercise its own supremacy, depends upon (it needs) that which is not God, and, because that which is not God depends upon God, the PNC also depends upon God (and, for that reason, ultimately depends solely upon God).

Of course, this does not change the fact that not even God can make it such that this table should be contradictory (that, for example, it should both be and not be at the same time). In short, the principle exercises real power over that which is not God, but the “subjects” over which the PNC exercises this power are provided for it by God alone, whose power is therefore sovereignly placed above that of the PNC. It must also be emphasized that God can reserve wide freedom of action from his subordinate PNC. Water does not burn, but if God wishes, it can burn: I am alluding to the possibility of miracles, which has nothing contradictory about it (although saying that miracles are not contradictory does not mean saying that miracles exist: I can know that something is not contradictory without knowing if it exists). It would be contradictory for water to both burn and not burn at the same time, and it would be contradictory for water, which according to its nature cannot burn, to burn without something or Someone intervening to change its nature in such a way as to make it compatible with combustion. Of course—Thomas *docet*—God cannot make this table (and all this is evoked by saying “this table which is” depends on God) both be and not be at the same time.

God is non-contradictory, he does not violate the PNC. If I say that God is non-contradictory, am I affirming that he is subordinate to the PNC? No, I am saying that God is God and is not not God (it becomes clear here that the PNC and the principle of identity form a circle, or better that they are one and the same principle). Does being oneself and not not being oneself, perhaps, mean being subordinated to the PNC as to an external rule? Or instead is being oneself (and not being not oneself) nothing other than depending on oneself, which ultimately means *not depending at all*? Can it even be called “dependance” to depend upon oneself? And is breaking the PNC, being contradictory, or not being able even to be oneself and also not not oneself—being, contradictorily, oneself and also not oneself—perhaps a more wonderful and valuable form of independence? Would an independence without being independent, which—being contradictory—is not even able to be itself, and for this reason is not even able to exist, be a divine independence, or something worse than slavery?

3) Revelation does not violate the universally true philosophical principles

Nayed writes:

Of course, despite the authority of Aquinas on things reasonable and logical, Aquinas himself, and the Catholic Church throughout its history, had to preserve a space for ultra-logics that do not fit neatly into the categories of human logics. That is the only way to preserve the authoritative (for them) teachings of Paul and other Christian sages on a “Wisdom of God” that transcends the “Wisdom of the World”. The appeal to such “extra-rationality” is very clear in the authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church. *Fides et Ratio* itself has many passages defending precisely such a position not on the basis of “Reason” but on the basis of “Revelation”.

I must disagree. The texts considered are a brief but eloquent explanation of how completely extraneous it is to the theological method of Thomas to sing the praises of the reason given to us by God, patiently examining its features, and then, in the face of the presumed (by Nayad) elements of incompatibility between reason and Revelation, in order to avoid giving up one’s creed, to carve out for the faith a sort of free zone in which it can survive, a niche beyond reason and

logic, immune to the categories of human logic and exempt from the jurisdiction of the PNC. I do not see how this position can claim not to be marked by a fideist opportunism that is in disagreement with Catholic orthodoxy no less than with Thomas. Thomas maintains and affirms—as has been shown—that what is contradictory cannot exist. Therefore, if he had seen anything contradictory about God being one and triune, he would have duly noted the impossibility that a one and triune God should exist, and with that would have stopped believing in an article of the faith that reason had determined to be invalidated through a violation of the PNC. If Thomas never made an effort to warn against faith in the Trinity, it is because in his view the Trinity is not at all contradictory, it does not violate the principles of reason and being. For Thomas, as for the Catholic magisterium, articles of Revelation such as the one and triune being of God and Jesus Christ being true man and true God are not irrational assertions, against reason, that can establish themselves in violation of the PNC, as the prototype of the principles that preside over rational thought (and over being, given the aforementioned inseparability between the logical and the ontological). If Thomas and the Church were to discover an infraction of the PNC in some revealed teaching, they would have to proclaim that Revelation deceives itself and others. But for Thomas and for the Catholic magisterium, no article of the faith is contradictory or against reason. When the magisterium says that a revealed teaching surpasses reason, it is not saying that it is against reason and its principles (above all, the PNC), but only that *reason cannot, by its own power, demonstrate the articles of faith*.

Here is a survey (far from exhaustive, of course) of texts from Thomas that are explicit in this regard:

Questiones disputatae de veritate, q. 14, a. 10: “*habere fidem de his quae sunt supra rationem, necessarium est ad vitam aeternam consequendam*” (“*Having faith in things that surpass reason is necessary to attain eternal life*”).

Super Boetium De Trinitate, pars 1, q. 1, a. 4: “*Responsio. Dicendum quod Deum esse trinum et unum est solum creditum, et nullo modo potest demonstrative probari [...] Deum non cognoscimus in statu viae nisi ex effectibus [...] Trinitas autem personarum non potest percipi ex ipsa causalitate divina, cum causalitas sit communis toti Tri-*

nitati. [...] Unde nullo modo demonstrative probari potest Deum esse trinum et unum" ("That God is one and triune is only believed, and in no way can be proven by the demonstrative way. In the present state—in *statu viae*: that is, as long as we are on pilgrimage in this world toward the heavenly homeland—we do not know God except through effects. The Trinity of persons cannot be known on the basis of the consideration of divine causality, because causality is common to the entire Trinity. Therefore it cannot be proven in any way through rational demonstration that God is triune and one").

Scriptum super Sententiis, lib. 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 4: "Respondeo: concedendum est absque ulla ambiguitate, esse in Deo pluralitatem suppositorum vel personarum in unitate essentiae, non propter rationes inductas, quae non necessario concludunt, sed propter fidei veritatem" ("I respond. It must be granted without any ambiguity that in God there is a plurality of subjects or persons in a single essence; *this is not granted by virtue of rational arguments, which do not conclude according to necessity, but by virtue of the truth of the faith*").

Scriptum super Sententiis, lib. 1, d. 3, q. 1, a. 4: "Respondeo dicendum, quod per naturalem rationem non potest perveniri in cognitionem Trinitatis personarum [...] Et hujus ratio est, quia naturalis ratio non cognoscit Deum nisi ex creaturis. Omnia autem quae dicuntur de Deo per respectum ad creaturas, pertinent ad essentiam et non ad personas. Et ideo ex naturali ratione non venit nisi in attributa divinae essentiae" ("I respond and say that it is not possible to arrive at knowledge of the Trinity of persons through natural reason. The reason for this is that natural reason does not know God except by beginning from creatures. Now, everything that is said of God with regard to creatures concerns the essence, and not the persons. Therefore natural reason can arrive only at the attributes of the divine essence").

Summa contra Gentiles, lib. 1, cap. 3: "Est autem in his quae de Deo confitemur duplex veritatis modus. Quaedam namque vera sunt de Deo quae omnem facultatem humanae rationis excedunt, ut Deum esse trinum et unum. Quaedam vero sunt ad quae etiam ratio naturalis pertingere potest, sicut est Deum esse, Deum esse unum, et alia huiusmodi; quae etiam philosophi demonstrative de Deo probaverunt, ducti naturalis lumine rationis" ("There are two different kinds of truths that we profess concerning God. *There are, in fact, some truths about*

God that exceed any capacity of human reason, as for example that God is one and triune. Then there are others to which human reason can attain, as for example that God exists, that he is one, and others of this kind; the philosophers have proven these truths in the demonstrative way, guided by the light of natural reason"). "*Si intellectus humanus alicuius rei substantiam comprehendit, puta lapidis vel trianguli, nullum intelligibilem illius rei facultatem humanae rationis excedet. Quod quidem nobis circa Deum non accidit. Nam ad substantiam ipsius capiendam intellectus humanus naturali virtute pertinere non potest: cum intellectus nostri, secundum modum praesentis vitae, cognitio a sensu incipiat; et ideo ea quae in sensu non cadunt, non possunt humano intellectu capi, nisi quatenus ex sensibilibus earum cognitio colligitur. Sensibilia autem ad hoc ducere intellectum nostrum non possunt ut in eis divina substantia videatur quid sit: cum sint effectus causae virtutem non aequantes. Ducitur tamen ex sensibilibus intellectus noster in divinam cognitionem ut cognoscat de Deo quia est, et alia huiusmodi quae oportet attribui primo principio. Sunt igitur quaedam intelligibilia divinorum quae humanae rationi sunt pervia; quaedam vero quae omnino vim humanae rationis excedunt*" ("If human intelligence understands the substance of a certain thing—as for example of a stone or a triangle—none of the intelligible aspects of that thing exceeds the capacity of human reason. But this cannot happen concerning God. In fact, human intelligence cannot, with its own natural capacity, grasp what the substance of God is: since the knowledge of our intellect, in the state of the present life, starts from the senses; and therefore the things that do not fall under the senses cannot be understood by the human intellect, except to the extent that knowledge about them is derived from sensible things. Sensible things therefore cannot lead our intelligence to the point of seeing in them the nature of the divine substance: because they are effects that do not equal the power—the perfection—of the cause. Nonetheless our intellect is led from sensible things to knowledge of the divine, so that it may know that God exists and other aspects that must be attributed to the first principle. Thus there are some aspects of the knowable divine truths that are accessible to human reason, while there are others that entirely exceed the power of human reason").

Super Boetium De Trinitate, pars 1, q. 2, a. 3: "Utrum in scientia

fidei quae est de Deo liceat rationibus philosophicis et auctoritatibus uti. Responsio. Dicendum quod dona gratiarum hoc modo naturae adduntur quod eam non tollunt, sed magis perficiunt; unde et lumen fidei, quod nobis gratis infunditur, non destruit lumen naturalis rationis divinitus nobis inditum. Et quamvis lumen naturale mentis humanae sit insufficiens ad manifestationem eorum quae manifestantur per fidem, tamen impossibile est quod ea, quae per fidem traduntur nobis divinitus, sint contraria his quae sunt per naturam nobis indita. Oporteret enim alterum esse falsum; et cum utrumque sit nobis a Deo, Deus nobis esset auctor falsitatis, quod est impossibile. Sed magis cum in imperfectis inveniatur aliqua imitatio perfectorum, in ipsis, quae per naturalem rationem cognoscuntur, sunt quaedam similitudines eorum quae per fidem sunt tradita” (“Question: Whether in the science of faith that concerns God it is permissible to make use of philosophical arguments and authorities. Answer: It must be said that *the gifts of grace are added to nature in such a way that they do not eliminate it, but make it more perfect; thus also the light of faith, which is infused by grace, does not destroy the light of reason placed in us by God. And although the natural light of the human mind is insufficient to make manifest that which is manifested through faith, nonetheless it is impossible that what is given to us by God through faith should be contrary to what is placed in us through nature.* In fact (if this were to occur) one of the two things would have to be false; and because we receive both of them from God, God would be a creator of falsity for us, something that is impossible. Instead, because there is a certain imitation of perfect things in imperfect things, in the things that are known through natural reason there are some resemblances with the things that are communicated to us through faith”).

“Sicut autem sacra doctrina fundatur supra lumen fidei, ita philosophia fundatur supra lumen naturale rationis; unde impossibile est quod ea, quae sunt philosophiae, sint contraria his quae sunt fidei, sed deficiunt ab eis. Continent tamen aliquas eorum similitudines et quaedam ad ea praeambula, sicut natura praeambula est ad gratiam. Si quid autem in dictis philosophorum invenitur contrarium fidei, hoc non est philosophia, sed magis philosophiae abusus ex defectu rationis. [...] Sicut enim ea quae sunt fidei non possunt demonstrative probari, ita quaedam contraria eis non possunt demonstrative ostendi esse

falsa, sed potest ostendi ea non esse necessaria" ("Just as sacred doctrine is founded on the light of faith, so philosophy is founded on the natural light of reason. Therefore it is impossible that the things that belong to philosophy should be contrary to those that belong to faith: only, the things that belong to philosophy do not include those that belong to faith. Nonetheless they contain certain similarities with those of faith, and a certain preamble (a certain introduction) to them, just as nature is a preamble to grace. Thus if in the sentences of the philosophers one finds something that is contrary to faith, this is not philosophy, but an abuse of philosophy (an incorrect exercise of philosophy) due to a lack of reason (that is, an imperfect use of reason). In fact, just as the truths proper to faith cannot be proven in the demonstrative way, so also some statements contrary to them cannot be proven false in the demonstrative way, but it can be demonstrated that they are not cogent statements"). "*Sic ergo in sacra doctrina philosophia possumus tripliciter uti. Primo ad demonstrandum ea quae sunt praeambula fidei, quae necesse est in fide scire, ut ea quae naturalibus rationibus de Deo probantur, ut Deum esse, Deum esse unum et alia huiusmodi vel de Deo vel de creaturis in philosophia probata, quae fides supponit. Secundo ad notificandum per aliquas similitudines ea quae sunt fidei, sicut Augustinus in libro de Trinitate utitur multis similitudinibus ex doctrinis philosophicis sumptis ad manifestandum Trinitatem. Tertio ad resistendum his quae contra fidem dicuntur sive ostendendo ea esse falsa sive ostendendo ea non esse necessaria*" ("Therefore we can use philosophy in sacred doctrine in three ways: in the first way, to demonstrate the preambles of faith, which are necessary to the knowledge of faith, like the things—that God exists, and other truths of this kind concerning God and creatures—that are proven about God with arguments of natural reason in an established philosophy, which faith presupposes. In the second way, we can use philosophy in sacred doctrine to make the contents of the faith clear through resemblances, as Augustine in *De Trinitate* uses many resemblances taken from philosophical doctrines to present the Trinity. In the third way, to resist the arguments that are presented against the faith, either by showing that they are false or by demonstrating that they are not cogent").

"Tamen utentes philosophia in sacra doctrina possunt dupliciter errare. Uno modo in hoc quod utantur his quae sunt contra fidem, quae

non sunt philosophiae, sed corruptio vel abusus eius, sicut Origenes fecit. Alio modo, ut ea quae sunt fidei includantur sub metis philosophiae, ut scilicet si aliquis credere nolit nisi quod per philosophiam haberi potest, cum e converso philosophia sit ad metas fidei redigenda" ("Nonetheless those who use philosophy in sacred doctrine can err in two ways. One way is that of making recourse, as Origen did, to arguments that are against faith: *and these arguments are not proper to philosophy, but are an abuse or corruption of it.* The other way is to include among the aims of philosophy the things that belong to faith, as would happen if someone did not want to believe anything not acquired through philosophy, while on the contrary philosophy must be addressed to the aims of faith").

Summa contra Gentiles, lib. 1, cap. 7: "Quod veritati fidei Christianae non contrariatur veritas rationis" ("That the truth of reason does not contrast with the truth of the Christian faith").

"Quamvis autem praedicta veritas fidei Christianae humanae rationis capacitatem excedat, haec tamen quae ratio naturaliter indita habet, huic veritati contraria esse non possunt" ("In spite of the fact that the truth of the Christian faith which we have discussed surpasses the capacity of human reason, the things that reason naturally contains within itself cannot be contrary to this truth").

"Ea enim quae naturaliter rationi sunt insita, verissima esse constat: in tantum ut nec esse falsa sit possibile cogitare. Nec id quod fide tenetur, cum tam evidenter divinitus confirmatum sit, fas est credere esse falsum. Quia igitur solum falsum vero contrarium est, ut ex eorum definitionibus inspectis manifeste apparet, impossibile est illis principiis quae ratio naturaliter cognoscit praedictam veritatem fidei contrariam esse" ("In fact, it emerges that the things embedded by nature in reason are absolutely true: to such an extent that it is not even possible to think that they are false. Nor is it permissible to believe that what is professed by faith is false, because it has been confirmed in such an evidently divine way. So because only the false is contrary to the true, as appears clearly from their confirmed definitions, it is impossible that the truth of faith should be contrary to those principles that reason knows naturally").

"Illud idem quod inducitur in animam discipuli a docente, doctoris scientia continet: nisi doceat fecte, quod de Deo nefas est dicere. Prin-

cipiorum autem naturaliter notorum cognitio nobis divinitus est indita: cum ipse Deus sit nostrae auctor naturae. Haec ergo principia etiam divina sapientia continet. Quicquid igitur principiis huiusmodi contrarium est, divinae sapientiae contrariatur. Non igitur a Deo esse potest. Ea igitur quae ex revelatione divina per fidem tenentur, non possunt naturali cognitioni esse contraria” (“The teacher’s knowledge contains the same thing that the teacher instills in the mind of the student: unless he teaches in a deceptive way, but it is not permissible to say this about God. *The knowledge of naturally known principles is placed within us by God: because God himself is the author of our nature. Therefore the divine wisdom also contains (has within itself) these principles. For this reason, all that which is in contrast with principles of this kind contrasts with the divine wisdom. Therefore it cannot come from God.* Thus the things that are professed by faith in virtue of divine revelation cannot be in contrast with natural knowledge”).

“Ex quo evidenter colligitur, quaecumque argumenta contra fidei documenta ponantur, haec ex principiis primis naturae inditis per se notis non recte procedere. Unde nec demonstrationis vim habent, sed vel sunt rationes probabiles vel sophisticae. Et sic ad ea solvenda locus relinquitur” (“From this it is substantiated that any arguments advanced against the teachings of the faith are not correctly derived from the first principles instilled in nature. Therefore they have no demonstrative power, but they are merely probable or sophistic arguments. And thus the possibility of disproving them remains”).

In investigating the topic of the Trinity, Thomas avoids the temptation of considering it something impossible, contradictory, but affirms that it cannot be demonstrated that God is one and triune. Thomas exerts himself at length, with remarkable insight, in disputing the thesis of those who claim that it is contradictory for God to be one and triune (one need only consult *Summa Theologiae*, I, qq. 27–43). His conclusion is: it is not contradictory that God should be one and triune (and the same thing can be said about Jesus Christ’s being true man and true God), but reason alone cannot obtain incontrovertible proof of the one and triune nature of God: demonstrating that something is not contradictory is not incontrovertible proof that it exists. Thus, Thomas demonstrates the existence of God, he affirms that it cannot be demonstrated through reason alone that God is one and

triune, he demonstrates that the one and triune nature of God in which he believes is not contradictory, and affirms that there are not and cannot be merely rational arguments proving that God has such a nature. This is not the place to take a position on the cogency of the arguments that Thomas uses to demonstrate the existence of God, and to illustrate further that it is not contradictory for God to be one and triune: what matters is the fact that Thomas does not accept that anything, including that which is professed according to faith (and which, like the one and triune nature of God, cannot be discovered by any merely rational means), should be contradictory. On the other hand, this does not seem to rule out that 1) I cannot know, by the light of reason alone, whether something exists, and 2) even though to the light of my reason this thing should appear non-contradictory, its existence is not impossible.

So as for the presumed infractions of the PNC contained in Catholic doctrine (such as the profession of God as one and triune, and Jesus Christ being true man and true God) to which Nayed refers, it is not enough to mention the opinion of “many Muslim theologians” according to whom the idea of a God-man (and that of a one and triune God) is of the same kind as that of a “square circle”, a contradictory idea: *the contradictory nature of a God-man (and of the one and triune nature of God) must be proven, and, as has been shown, a theologian no less authoritative than those enlisted by Nayed, Thomas Aquinas, firmly maintained that the humanity and divinity of Christ and the one and triune nature of God do not violate the PNC.*

It is worth repeating that Thomas’ position is the following: Revelation is necessary to man, and exceeds human reason, but cannot be opposed to reason, and therefore above all it cannot violate the PNC. The encyclical by John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, does not teach otherwise (although Nayed is of the opposite view, and frankly I do not see on what basis this is justified), which reminds the Catholic that:

1) Revelation is necessary to administer to man the fullness of the means of salvation, and cannot be replaced by any discovery of human reason:

These considerations prompt a first conclusion: *the truth made known to us by Revelation is neither the product nor the consummation of an*

GOD DOES NOT VIOLATE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

argument devised by human reason. It appears instead as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love. This revealed truth is set within our history as an anticipation of that ultimate and definitive vision of God which is reserved for those who believe in him and seek him with a sincere heart. The ultimate purpose of personal existence, then, is the theme of philosophy and theology alike. For all their difference of method and content, both disciplines point to that “path of life” (*Ps 16:11*) which, as faith tells us, leads in the end to the full and lasting joy of the contemplation of the Triune God (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 15, italics mine).

2) Revelation perfects but does not abolish reason, it does not subvert its principles, because reason is capable of truth, and what is gained from a correct exercise of reason (and therefore cannot be contradictory, since the observance of the PNC is an indispensable condition for a correct exercise of reason) cannot be dismissed by that which is revealed. Reason is given to man by God, and therefore the correct exercise of reason cannot clash with Revelation, which is also given to man by God:

Yet this sapiential function could not be performed *by a philosophy which was not itself a true and authentic knowledge*, addressed, that is, not only to particular and subordinate aspects of reality—functional, formal or utilitarian—but *to its total and definitive truth, to the very being of the object which is known*. This prompts a second requirement: that philosophy verify the human capacity to *know the truth*, to come to a knowledge which can reach *objective truth* by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which the Scholastic Doctors referred (cf., for example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 16, 1; Saint Bonaventure, *Coll. In Hex.*, 3, 8, 1). This requirement, proper to faith, was explicitly reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council: ‘Intelligence is not confined to observable data alone. It can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partially obscured and weakened’ (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”, *Gaudium et Spes*, 15)” (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 82, italics mine).

The Council began with the basic criterion, presupposed by Revelation itself, of the natural knowability of the existence of God, the beginning and end of all things (cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, “Dogmatic

Constitution on the Catholic Faith”, *Dei Filius*, II: DS 3004; and Canon 2, 1: DS 3026), and concluded with the solemn assertion quoted earlier: ‘There are two orders of knowledge, distinct not only in their point of departure, but also in their object’ (*Ibid.*, IV: DS 3015, cited in Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”, *Gaudium et Spes*, 59). *Against all forms of rationalism, then, there was a need to affirm the distinction between the mysteries of faith and the findings of philosophy, and the transcendence and precedence of the mysteries of faith over the findings of philosophy. Against the temptations of fideism, however, it was necessary to stress the unity of truth and thus the positive contribution which rational knowledge can and must make to faith’s knowledge: ‘Even if faith is superior to reason there can never be a true divergence between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals the mysteries and bestows the gift of faith has also placed in the human spirit the light of reason. This God could not deny himself, nor could the truth ever contradict the truth’* (First Vatican Ecumenical Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith”, *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3017) (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 53, italics mine).

Other modes of *latent fideism* appear in the scant consideration accorded to speculative theology, and in disdain for the classical philosophy from which the terms of both the understanding of faith and the actual formulation of dogma have been drawn. My revered Predecessor Pope Pius XII warned against such neglect of the philosophical tradition and against abandonment of the traditional terminology (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 55, italics mine).

If the article revealed could contravene the PNC, the encyclical would not be called *Fides et Ratio*, but, under the banner of a peremptory disjunction: *aut fides aut ratio*, either faith or reason. The Catholic magisterium therefore discourages against understanding the faith in an irrational way, against thinking that an article of revelation could be contrary to reason (above all, contrary to the PNC), because it sees in this attitude the continually arising threat of abandoning oneself to fideism: that fideism whose motto could be precisely “*aut fides aut ratio*”, “either faith or reason”. Not giving in to irrationalistic fideism does not mean being a rationalist. The rationalist is the one who, having accepted the disjunction “either faith or reason”, takes the side of reason and denies any autonomy for faith, rejecting any form of

revealed religion or at the most seeking to neutralize revelation by distorting its irreplaceable specificity and necessity, domesticating it within the sphere of pure reason; the fideist is the one who, having accepted the same disjunction, sacrifices reason in order to keep faith solid, fearing that reason would seduce faith into a conceptual apparatus that would smother its dynamism and disfigure its authenticity. The Catholic magisterium, proclaiming the harmony of faith and reason, intends to avoid the opposite deviations of rationalism and fideism. The moral doctrine of the Church also holds firm the harmony between faith and reason. The encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993)—the most extensive document elaborated in this regard under the pontificate of John Paul II—states at number 72 (*italics mine*):

The *morality of acts* is defined by the relationship of man's freedom with the authentic good. This good is established, as the eternal law, by Divine Wisdom which orders every being towards its end: *this eternal law is known both by man's natural reason* (hence it is 'natural law'), *and — in an integral and perfect way — by God's supernatural Revelation* (hence it is called 'divine law').

And at number 45 (*italics mine*):

Even if moral-theological reflection *usually distinguishes between the positive or revealed law of God and the natural law*, and, within the economy of salvation, between the 'old' and the 'new' law, it must not be forgotten that *these and other useful distinctions always refer to that law whose author is the one and the same God and which is always meant for man*. The different ways in which God, acting in history, cares for the world and for mankind are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they support each other and intersect.

Nayed reputes that the following extract from *Fides et Ratio* shows that "in spite of the authority of Aquinas on rational and logical things, Aquinas himself, and the Catholic Church, throughout their existence have had to set room aside for things that surpass logic and do not fit neatly into the categories of human logic. This is the only way to preserve the binding (for them) teachings of Paul and of other Christian authorities on the 'Wisdom of God' that transcends the 'Wisdom of the World' [...] *Fides et Ratio* itself has many passages defend-

ing precisely such a position not on the basis of ‘Reason’, but on the basis of ‘Revelation’:

At the First Vatican Council, the Fathers had stressed the supernatural character of God’s Revelation. On the basis of mistaken and very widespread assertions, the *rationalist* critique of the time attacked faith and denied the possibility of any knowledge which was not the fruit of reason’s natural capacities. This obliged the Council to reaffirm emphatically that there exists a knowledge which is peculiar to faith, surpassing the knowledge proper to human reason, which nevertheless by its nature can discover the Creator. This knowledge expresses a truth based upon the very fact of God who reveals himself, a truth which is most certain, since God neither deceives nor wishes to deceive” (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 8, italics mine).

But it is evident that this passage of the encyclical does not at all confirm the thesis supported by Nayed according to which revelation could place itself outside of the principles of human rational principles, unbound by any logic of non-contradiction. The severe warning at this place in the encyclical is addressed against the *mistaken* use of reason, and pointedly *against rationalism*, not against reason, which on the contrary the encyclical stresses “by its nature can discover the Creator”.

The other extract that Nayed takes from the encyclical is contained in number 23:

This is why the Christian’s relationship to philosophy requires thorough-going discernment. In the New Testament, especially in the Letters of Saint Paul, one thing emerges with great clarity: the opposition between “the wisdom of this world” and the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The depth of revealed wisdom disrupts the cycle of our habitual patterns of thought, which are in no way able to express that wisdom in its fullness.

The beginning of the First Letter to the Corinthians poses the dilemma in a radical way. The crucified Son of God is the historic event upon which every attempt of the mind to construct an adequate explanation of the meaning of existence upon merely human argumentation comes to grief. The true key-point, which challenges every philosophy, is Jesus Christ’s death on the Cross. It is here that every attempt to reduce the Father’s saving plan to purely human logic is doomed to failure.

GOD DOES NOT VIOLATE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the learned? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor 1:20), the Apostle asks emphatically. The wisdom of the wise is no longer enough for what God wants to accomplish; what is required is a decisive step towards welcoming something radically new: “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise ...; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are” (1 Cor 1:27-28). Human wisdom refuses to see in its own weakness the possibility of its strength; yet Saint Paul is quick to affirm: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). Man cannot grasp how death could be the source of life and love; yet to reveal the mystery of his saving plan God has chosen precisely that which reason considers “foolishness” and a “scandal”. Adopting the language of the philosophers of his time, Paul comes to the summit of his teaching as he speaks the paradox: “God has chosen in the world ... that which is nothing to reduce to nothing things that are” (cf. 1 Cor 1:28). In order to express the gratuitous nature of the love revealed in the Cross of Christ, the Apostle is not afraid to use the most radical language of the philosophers in their thinking about God. Reason cannot eliminate the mystery of love which the Cross represents, while the Cross can give to reason the ultimate answer which it seeks. It is not the wisdom of words, but the Word of Wisdom which Saint Paul offers as the criterion of both truth and salvation.

The wisdom of the Cross, therefore, breaks free of all cultural limitations which seek to contain it and insists upon an openness to the universality of the truth which it bears. What a challenge this is to our reason, and how great the gain for reason if it yields to this wisdom! Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being’s ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and, with the assistance of faith, it is capable of accepting the “foolishness” of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising. The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth. Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two may meet.

These intense reflections from the encyclical must not be mistaken for an incitement for reason to recognize its radical impotence in the

face of Revelation, to set aside its own principles, and to accept that which is revealed, which is held to be in irreconcilable opposition with the logic of reason. The pope and philosopher John Paul II is not arguing in favor of a dizzying contrast, an irremediable split between faith and reason, but instead is urging philosophy that it not allow its search for the truth to strand it in the shallows of false systems, but dare to accept the challenge of the cross, of a God who becomes flesh, dies, and rises again for men. The pontiff is exhorting reason to look without fear at the cross of Christ, at the “radical novelty” that it introduces, which does not disparage reason or extinguish the validity of its principles, but purifies it, if only reason agrees to be itself, meaning that it work impartially according to the principles proper to it (including, obviously, the PNC), without shutting itself up in narrow systems that frustrate its potential and block it from recognizing in the incarnation of Christ an authentic and ultimate possibility for an answer given by Revelation to human thought, which is engaged in searching out the deep meaning of existence.

It is therefore clear that terms like “paradox”, “foolishness”, and “scandal” *do not take on any irrationalistic connotations*, and that *Fides et Ratio* rejects any interpretation of Pauline teaching that would depict a gaping disparity between faith and reason, by virtue of which reason would have to renounce and empty itself in order to allow man to approach the truth revealed. If much of theology, including Catholic theology, is sometimes beguiled by the attractions of this more or less blatant fideism, Catholic orthodoxy has nothing in common with it, as *Fides et Ratio* eloquently attests:

In brief, there are signs of a widespread distrust of universal and absolute statements, especially among those who think that truth is born of consensus and not *of a consonance between intellect and objective reality*. . . it is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true. *Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason* (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 56).

The same viewpoint is reflected in Benedict XVI’s *lectio* held on 12 September, 2006, at the University of Regensburg (italics mine):

GOD DOES NOT VIOLATE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

This gives rise to positions which clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God's transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions. As opposed to this, the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which—as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated—unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf. *Certainly, love, as Saint Paul says, “transcends” knowledge and is thereby capable of perceiving more than thought alone* (cf. Eph 3:19); *nonetheless it continues to be love of the God who is Logos. Consequently, Christian worship is, again to quote Paul—“λογικὴ λατρεία”, worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason* (cf. Rom 12:1). *This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history—it is an event which concerns us even today.*

This clearly highlights the mistake made by those who find in the conception of the creator *Logos* an interference by the Hellenistic *forma mentis* that is seen as adulterating the genuine scriptural meaning of the *Logos*, marking it with a merely rational and rationalizing connotation, segregating it within the confines of abstract and abstracting thought, which makes an abstraction of the concreteness of life, of the sentiments, of the daily travails and aspirations of man. These abstract categories taken from Greek philosophy are believed to have significantly influenced the theological elaboration of the meaning of *Logos*, the effects of this being seen both in the formulation of the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas, and in the Scholastic tradition, skewed toward an excessively condescending interrogation of the sacred text, with a perspective borrowed from Aristotle, which hides or even deforms the genuine figure of Jesus of Nazareth. The need, then, is thought to be that of returning to the sources, freeing

our interpretation of the sacred text from the corrosion deposited on it by centuries of interpretive models inspired by mentalities substantially foreign to that (or those) which permeated the writers of the sacred texts.

In short: if one wishes to enculturate the Christian faith, and not Aristotle, Plato, or Plotinus, then the proclamation of faith needs to be purified from the infiltrations of philosophical reasoning, from the conception of truth as a cold and disembodied element of a sophisticated intellectual apparatus, highly Greek and hardly Christian, which revolves around concepts, definitions, reasoning, argumentation. While not denying that a certain exegesis may have been more attentive to the presumed requirements of human reason than to the genuineness of the sacred texts, it would nonetheless be misguided not to realize that the contribution of Greek philosophy has a universal value, because the logical and ontological principles that its best expressions have revealed are universal. Such that a proclamation of faith like that of Christianity, if it does not wish to give up its claim to universality, cannot hastily dismiss the universally and perennially valid legacy of the philosophical thought that sprouted on Greek soil and later asserted itself in medieval theological development, from Augustine to Bonaventure to Duns Scotus to Thomas. It is therefore naive and gratuitously prejudicial to maintain, for example, that the most astute theological reflection has clung to an interpretation of the *Logos* as an abstract and distant form of reason, unfit to express the total adherence of a God who became man to man in his completeness and profundity. It should be observed that the very conception of "truth," as it matured in classical philosophical thought and developed in the Christian Middle Ages, concerns the entirety of the human being, and not only man as a constructor of syllogisms. What is meant, in fact, by a judgment of the type "this thing is true", if not "I commit myself here and now to affirming and to bearing witness that I am affirming this, that things are precisely this way: it is on this conviction that my way of being here and now is constructed, and I also want others to know this"? The truth thus proclaimed is indeed something that entails my commitment to recognize it as such, and to declare that an integral part of my actual experience is the conviction and the testimony that hinges on the truth of what I claim to be true. Also, in saying that this

is true, I am declaring that what is true is trustworthy, and I indicate and recommend to others this trustworthiness. And that which is trustworthy is something I can rely on, to find a meaning for what I am and what I do, for myself in all my dimensions, without being deceived by something false: not true, fleeting, unreliable. What could be more comforting to say than that the foundation of our lives is true, and not phoney, illusory, deceptive? And is this not true, this non-deceptive, close relative of that which is good and worthy of being loved, the contrary of what is false and that from which nothing good can be expected? The *Logos*, which said it was the truth, what is this if not the trustworthy God who infuses meaning and order, dispelling the threat of chaos, who gathers together that which has been scattered, who remains faithful and consistent with himself despite the capriciousness, the license, and the unfaithfulness of men? At this point it would be unjustified to contrast a God of reason and a God of will, a God-*Logos* as calculating reason and a God-love who is close to the joys, the hopes, the torments, and the anxieties of men. God is the true and trustworthy *Logos* precisely because he is love that knows by loving and by loving knows men, he does not disregard a single beat of the human heart and confers meaning and completeness on everything that man is. But how could he govern all things with love, and even overcome death, if he were not the unshakeable foundation of all things? If philosophy succeeds in demonstrating that this foundation exists, is it not examining—within its own disciplinary identity, of course—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? How can one not realize that the most penetrating metaphysical reflection has grasped the meaning of the Foundation of all things, creator through love and through love the giver of all good things to his creatures? Only a summary assessment that is ungenerous toward the history of philosophical thought, then, can push for the sake of the faith a separation between the God of the philosophers and the God of Jesus Christ, between hellenized Christianity and its finally de-hellenized form. How can a universal truth, recognized as such, be proposed to a man who, by depriving himself of the openness of reason to the true and universal (that openness of which the philosophical endeavor should be the testimony and exercise par excellence), makes himself incapable of thinking in terms of universality and truth?

It seems to me that this is the thrust of the considerations in *Fides et Ratio*, and of Benedict XVI in Regensburg:

The importance of metaphysics becomes still more evident if we consider current developments in hermeneutics and the analysis of language. The results of such studies can be very helpful for the understanding of faith, since they bring to light the structure of our thought and speech and the meaning which language bears. However, some scholars working in these fields tend to stop short at the question of how reality is understood and expressed, without going further to see whether reason can discover its essence. How can we fail to see in such a frame of mind the confirmation of our present crisis of confidence in the powers of reason? When, on the basis of preconceived assumptions, these positions tend to obscure the contents of faith or to deny their universal validity, then not only do they abase reason but in so doing they also disqualify themselves. Faith clearly presupposes that human language is capable of expressing divine and transcendent reality in a universal way—analogically, it is true, but no less meaningfully for that. Were this not so, the word of God, which is always a divine word in human language, would not be capable of saying anything about God. The interpretation of this word cannot merely keep referring us to one interpretation after another, without ever leading us to a statement which is simply true; otherwise there would be no Revelation of God, but only the expression of human notions about God and about what God presumably thinks of us” (Fides et Ratio, no. 84, italics mine).

The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith has been countered by the call for a dehellenization of Christianity ... Before I draw the conclusions to which all this has been leading, I must briefly refer to the third stage of dehellenization, which is now in progress. In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was an initial inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieu. This thesis is not simply false, but it is coarse and lacking in precision. The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed. True, there are elements in the evolution of the early Church which do not have to be integrated into all cultures.

Nonetheless, the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself" (address given by Benedict XVI in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006).

No less pressing and penetrating are the following clarifications from *Fides et Ratio* on the nexus between metaphysics, theology (especially dogmatic theology), and biblical exegesis:

The word of God is not addressed to any one people or to any one period of history. Similarly, dogmatic statements, while reflecting at times the culture of the period in which they were defined, formulate an unchanging and ultimate truth. *This prompts the question of how one can reconcile the absoluteness and the universality of truth with the unavoidable historical and cultural conditioning of the formulas which express that truth.* The claims of historicism, I noted earlier, are untenable; but the use of a *hermeneutic open to the appeal of metaphysics* can show how it is possible to move from the historical and contingent circumstances in which the texts developed to the truth which they express, a truth transcending those circumstances.

Human language may be conditioned by history and constricted in other ways, but *the human being can still express truths which surpass the phenomenon of language.* Truth can never be confined to time and culture; in history it is known, but it also reaches beyond history.

To see this is to glimpse the solution of another problem: the problem of *the enduring validity of the conceptual language used in Conciliar definitions.* This is a question which my revered predecessor Pius XII addressed in his Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis*.

This is a complex theme to ponder, since one must reckon seriously with the meaning which words assume in different times and cultures. Nonetheless, the history of thought shows that *across the range of cultures and their development certain basic concepts retain their universal epistemological value and thus retain the truth of the propositions in which they are expressed* ('As for the meaning of dogmatic formulas, this remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed. The faithful therefore must shun the opinion, first, that dogmatic formulas (or some category of them) cannot signify the truth in a determinate way, but can only offer changeable approximations to it, which to a certain extent distort or alter it': "Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decla-

ration in Defence of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church", *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (24 June 1973), 5: AAS 65 (1973), 403). *Were this not the case, philosophy and the sciences could not communicate with each other, nor could they find a place in cultures different from those in which they were conceived and developed. The hermeneutical problem exists, to be sure; but it is not insoluble.* Moreover, the objective value of many concepts does not exclude that their meaning is often imperfect. This is where philosophical speculation can be very helpful. We may hope, then, that philosophy will be especially concerned to deepen the understanding of the relationship between conceptual language and truth, and to propose ways which will lead to a right understanding of that relationship.

The interpretation of sources is a vital task for theology; but another still more delicate and demanding task is *the understanding of revealed truth*, or the articulation of the *intellectus fidei*. The *intellectus fidei*, as I have noted, *demands the contribution of a philosophy of being which first of all would enable dogmatic theology to perform its functions appropriately . . . If the intellectus fidei wishes to integrate all the wealth of the theological tradition, it must turn to the philosophy of being*, which should be able to propose anew the problem of being—and this in harmony with the demands and insights of the entire philosophical tradition, including philosophy of more recent times, without lapsing into sterile repetition of antiquated formulas. *Set within the Christian metaphysical tradition, the philosophy of being is a dynamic philosophy which views reality in its ontological, causal and communicative structures. It is strong and enduring* because it is based upon the very act of being itself, which allows *a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole*, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfilment. *In theology, which draws its principles from Revelation as a new source of knowledge, this perspective is confirmed by the intimate relationship which exists between faith and metaphysical reasoning*" (*Fides et Ratio*, nos. 95–97).

Fides et Ratio takes care to emphasize that there exists, intact despite the tortuous adventures of philosophical reflection over the course of its history, a patrimony of "first and universal principles of being", brought to light by reason through its correct exercise, among which are mentioned *the PNC*.

"Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought

as a whole. Consider, for example, *the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality*, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with *the capacity to know God, truth and goodness*. Consider as well certain *fundamental moral norms* which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of *spiritual heritage of humanity*. It is as if we had come upon an *implicit philosophy*, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of *reference-point for the different philosophical schools*. *Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, orthós logos, recta ratio*" (*Fides et Ratio*, no. 4, italics mine).

It seems to me that these considerations do not require any further comment, and clearly show what is the Church's teaching in this regard. On 6 November, 2006, meeting with the participants in the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Benedict XVI gave an address worthy of the highest consideration, in which he recalled firmly that one of the "*first and universal principles of being*" evoked by *Fides et Ratio*, the principle of causality, is not nullified or even shaken by the evolution of the empirical sciences, as many scientists claim (as well as that part of public opinion which, even while ignoring the merit of the question, give credit to the illusory attempt of these scientists when they clumsily derive from their own discipline principles which they claim are binding on philosophical and theological research, of which these scientists know little and misunderstand much):

Science cannot, therefore, presume to provide a complete, deterministic representation of our future and of the development of every phenomenon that it studies. Philosophy and theology might make an important contribution to this fundamentally epistemological question by, for example, helping the empirical sciences to *recognize a difference between the mathematical inability to predict certain events and the validity of the principle of causality*, or between *scientific indeterminism or contin-*

gency (randomness) and causality on the philosophical level, or, more radically, between evolution as the origin of a succession in space and time, and *creation as the ultimate origin of participated being in essential Being*" (italics mine).

It must be noted that the pope, in referring to God, does not in any way avoid using words *drawn from philosophical thought*: "essential Being" (a description that closely resembles the Thomist *ipsum esse subsistens*, *the Being subsisting in itself*, *the Being by essence*, the only being whose essence is existence, or whose essence is identical with being) from which is derived "participated being" ("participation" is another typically philosophical thought).

4) God of Islam, God of Christianity: For a fraternal dialogue respectful of identity

I feel it is important for me to recall that in my previous text, I did not intend to endorse an artificial contrast between an Islamic God of will, even arbitrary will, and a Christian God of reason. I did not allow myself to be lured by the stereotypical controversies. I intended only to reiterate my own (and not mine only, as I think I have made clear) deeply rooted conviction: for anyone—Christian, Muslim, or other—to represent a God capable of violating the PNC is to insinuate into one's conception of the divine an irrationalism that tarnishes the image of God and risks making him completely extraneous to the fate of man, to man in his totality: body, spirit, thought, passions, affections, desires. The fact that this was my intention emerges:

1) from the reservations that I express regarding some tendencies present also in Catholic theology: "I am not overlooking the fact that much theology, including some found in Catholic circles, is afraid of a God who could not ignore the principle of non-contradiction, positing that a God who could not get around this principle would not be omnipotent, and could not exercise his own love in a supremely free manner . . . It is time to overcome the dead and sterile opposition between a God-Logos who by adhering to the principle of non-contradiction closes himself up in an unassailable rationalistic detachment impermeable to love, and a God-Love, who can at will violate rational principles simply to reinforce his own nature of free love in an absolute and omnipotent manner".

2) from the stated desire not to enter into any exegetical dispute concerning the Qur'an, nor to concern myself with theological reflection on the God of the Qur'an: "I do not intend to address this question, nor to hazard myself in dangerous exercises of Qur'anic exegesis".

Having reiterated that, I hope for a frank, peaceful, and fraternal dialogue between the faiths that refrains from emphasizing or undervaluing the real elements held in common, and from exaggerating or minimizing the real elements of difference. In this spirit, I will present a few considerations on the relationship between the religions, prompted by the observations of my interlocutor.

In his text, Nayed does not conceal the profound theological differences between Christianity and Islam (above all, concerning the Trinity and the incarnation of the Word). Paragraph 3 of *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions), attached to Nayed's text, clearly illustrates the convergences between Christianity and Islam, without hiding the significant differences ("Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God").

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

Paragraph 2 of *Nostra Aetate* also expresses appreciation for the commonalities, without ignoring the substantial differences (italics mine):

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

The Declaration on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, *Dominus Iesus* ("Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith", 6 August, 2000), which "takes up what has been taught in previous Magisterial documents, in order to reiterate certain truths that are part of the Church's faith" (no. 3), states in no. 7 (italics mine):

For this reason, the distinction between *theological faith* and *belief* in the other religions, must be *firmly held*. If faith is the acceptance in grace of revealed truth, which "makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently" (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 13), then belief, in the other religions, is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute.

This distinction is not always borne in mind in current theological reflection. Thus, theological faith (the acceptance of the truth revealed by the One and Triune God) is often identified with belief in other religions, which is religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself. This is one of the reasons why the differences between Christianity and the other religions tend to be reduced at times to the point of disappearance."

No. 14 should also be considered:

It must therefore be *firmly believed* as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accom-

GOD DOES NOT VIOLATE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

plished *once for all* in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.

Bearing in mind this article of faith, theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God's salvific plan, is invited to *explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation*. In this undertaking, theological research has a vast field of work under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council, in fact, has stated that: "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise to a manifold co-operation which is but a participation in this one source" (Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution", *Lumen gentium*, 62). The content of this participated mediation should be explored more deeply, but must remain always *consistent with the principle of Christ's unique mediation*: "Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his" (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris missio*, 5). Hence, those solutions that propose *a salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ would be contrary to Christian and Catholic faith*".

I conclude by once again thanking Nayed for the dialogue that he has wished to begin, with the hope of having clarified my thought, and renewing my always lively willingness to continue this dialogue in a spirit of friendship and mutual listening.

[Dr Aref Ali Nayed's reply to the above essay by Professor Martinetti will be published in Volume Two of *Vatican Engagements*]

PART THREE



DEBATE WITH MICHAEL CUYPERS
ON SACRED INTERPRETATION



Tradition as Seen by the Muslim Faith, Yesterday and Today

MICHAEL CUYPERS

[The leading Catholic website, Chiesa edited by Sandro Magister, published an essay on the tradition of interpretation in Islam by Michael Cuypers which led to a response by the author. We reproduce here both essays as published on the Chiesa website]

THE ISLAMIC RELIGION, in faith and law, is based on two fundamental normative sources: the Qur'an and tradition, the Sunna. Although the Qur'an takes precedence in that it is divine revelation, tradition constitutes its inseparable complement, as explanation and prophetic development. In fact, it contains the words and actions, the hadith, of the Prophet of Islam and also of his companions, transmitting the teaching and lifestyle of the prophet and the first generation of believers. It is, in short, a living commentary on the Qur'an. The hadith are believed to have been collected by the companions of the Prophet, and by some of his close relatives—his wives, his family—and then handed down orally by a chain of transmitters, *isnad*, through the generations, until they were taken down in writing by those who collected the hadith, the “traditionists.”

The constitution of the written body of tradition was much more slow and hesitant than that of the Qur'an. After a first century of oral transmission, it was only in the second century of the Hijra that, on the order of Caliph 'Umar II, the written compilation of the traditions began. But it was the third century of the Hijra that was the great

century of the compilations of tradition, which were gathered in vast collections, two of which would be considered indisputable points of reference over the course of Islamic history: the Bukhari collection—which assembles 7,275 hadith—and the Muslim collection—3,033 hadith—which would be given the name of the “two authentic,” *sahihayn*, because it contains only hadith that are considered authentic. In fact, in parallel with the pious effervescence of the traditions of the second and third century of the Hijra, and for the purpose of bringing together as many hadith as possible—Bukhari is thought to have collected 600,000—a “science of the hadith” was developed, which specifies the rules for distinguishing among the authentic traditions and the apocryphal ones, made to measure to support any sort of political, ideological, or partisan claim. We will come back to this later.

So although the Qur’an is the primary and fundamental source of faith and law, tradition is no less important in the organization of Islamic faith and practice, because it presents itself as an illustration of the norms and values of Qur’anic revelation, as taught and lived by the Prophet, a perfect model of the Islamic ideal that every believer seeks to imitate.

Believers nourish themselves ceaselessly from the tradition, through which they feel that they are in living union with the founder of Islam. It literally forms their religious conscience. Worship, preaching, and teaching refer to it constantly.

It also constitutes, together with the Qur’an, an indispensable point of reference for the religious sciences. It provides Qur’anic exegesis with a treasury of interpretations and *asbab al-nuzul*, those “occasions of revelation” that offer the historical reason why this or that verse was revealed. It provides norms for theology, *kalam*, and canon law, *fiqh*. Above all, the Qur’anic norm applies. But in the absence of a revealed norm, tradition is the authority. If tradition is not explicit on a topic, recourse is made to the other two secondary sources of the law, which have been accepted or rejected in different ways according to juridical school, by reason of their human origin: the community consensus, *ijma*^c, which is hard to implement, and rational effort, *ijtihad*, which cannot be imposed on all because of its subjective aspect.

But tradition also feeds the Islamic collective imagination in a larger way, providing historical and cultural references and bringing back to

life the exemplary first generation of believers. It thus plays an important role in the current re-Islamization of the Islamic world, preoccupied with returning to its original purity.

In this regard, attention must be paid to the importance of the *Sira*, "the life of the Prophet", written by Ibn Ishaq (died in 768) and revised by Ibn Hisham (died in 833). Although it is not part of the corpus of the hadith, this biography enjoys an almost canonical status, and plays a considerable role in believers' devotion to the prophet and the first Islamic community. Devoting a great deal of space to the prophet's exploits in battle, the *Sira* also describes in detail his daily life, so that his "way," *Sunna*, can serve as a model for the believer in his material, moral, and spiritual behavior.

Everything that we have said directly concerns the orthodox Sunni majority of Islam. Shi'i Islam also has a tradition of its own, but this does not refer to the same corpus or to the same chains of transmitters. The words and actions reported are not only those of the prophet, but more in general those of the "people of the house," *ahl al-bayt*—meaning the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and her husband 'Ali, with their two sons Hasan and Husayn—and of the successive imams. The transmitters also had to play their part in the legacy of the prophet. The main collection of Shi'i traditions is that of Kulayni (died in 940), which numbers more than 16,000 citations.

Since the first attempts to write down the hadith, Muslim scholars have warned of the need to ensure their authenticity. This necessity gave rise to a "science of the hadith," which developed above all an external criticism, centered on the validity of the chain of transmitters, *isnâd*. The questions advanced in this camp are of this kind: were the different transmitters really in contact, so that they could transmit the word in a continuous chain, from the companions of Muhammad to the compilers of the corpus? Were they morally and intellectually reliable? Did they not serve a deviant sectarian or political cause?

This science has therefore taken the form of a biographical study of all the figures included in the chains of transmitters of the collection of hadith, the most prominent of whom are the companions of the Prophet, the first witnesses. A classic of this genre, the "Book of Classes," *Kitab al-tabaqat*, by the traditionalist Ibn Sa'd (died in 845), collects about 4,250 biographical notes.

Criticism arrived at classifying the hadith according to their greater or lesser validity, beginning with the solid, or sound, hadith, moving to the good, acceptable, passable ones, and finally to the weak or frankly false and apocryphal ones. The success of the Bukhari and Muslim collections depends precisely on the great number of solid hadith that they contain. The hadith considered as more solid—and consequently unanimously accepted—are the ones transmitted in an identical way by numerous companions of the prophet, and confirmed by multiple chains of transmission.

If the chain of transmitters was solid, the traditionist showed himself willing to admit a hadith, no matter how unlikely its contents seemed. The internal criticism essentially concerned the agreement between the tone of the text, *matn*, of the hadith and the Qur'an. In the case of incompatibility between the two, the hadith had to be considered, in line of principle, as false. A marginal school—Zahirism—nonetheless did not hesitate to admit that a hadith can abrogate the Qur'an, by reason of the inspired character of the words of the prophet.

One would have to wait for Ibn Khaldun (died in 1406) for a reversal of the critical method to be proposed, according greater importance to the text of the hadith itself, instead of to the chain of transmitters: "One must not use this latter method (the validation of the *isnad*) except after studying the account in itself, in order to understand whether the facts it contains are plausible or not".

Since the end of the 19th century, two main attitudes toward the criticism of tradition can be distinguished in Islam.

On the one hand, some official institutions have perpetuated, up until our day, the classical positions. We cite Ali Merad, a modernist Muslim author: "In many Islamic universities, the role of the teaching body seems to be limited to ensuring the continuity of a form of knowledge validated by a sort of community consensus. As for tradition (and also the biography of the prophet), the near sacralization of the ancient authorities in this matter is the rule. To discuss these authorities, to open new avenues of research, means breaking with a cultural model that has functioned for more than a millennium, and that points the community back to the image of its identity, of its socio-cultural equilibrium, in continuity with its first sources".

But on the other hand, a reformist current emerged with Sayyid Ahmad Khan (died in 1898) in India, al-Afghani (died in 1897), and Muhammad ‘Abduh (died in 1905) in Egypt, and their disciples. In the name of the purity of the faith, for which God is the sole legislator, these thinkers supported only two normative sources of Islam, the Qur’an and tradition, thus excluding consensus and the *ijtihād*. They subjected the tradition to a more severe criticism of the chains of transmitters, and above all of the text itself. They kept only a small number of hadith, rejecting the traditions that offend reason or good sense. They employed the model of the ancients, the *salaf*—the first three generations of Muslims—to restore dynamism to religion, but without closing it up in its past: their aim was to allow Islam to find its identity and independence in a modern world undergoing complete transformation.

After this, the reformist position evolved in two divergent directions: one legalist and neo-fundamentalist, and one of secularist modernism, which abandoned tradition as a normative source.

For the former, the decision not to consider the two secondary normative sources—consensus and rational effort—leads to increasing the normative role of tradition, and at the same time of idealizing the ancients, the *salaf*, the first transmitters of tradition. In reaction to modernity—and accepting only its material progress—the idealized primitive era became the model to imitate, in a closing off of identity. The Muslim Brotherhood (founded in 1929) are the main representatives of this tendency.

For the latter, tradition loses its normative character: the authenticity of most of the traditions, which are subjected to more severe rational criticism, is brought into doubt (according to the model of the work of the famous Islamologist Ignaz Goldziher, who died in 1921). Otherwise, only the ethical and spiritual aspect is retained, as a form of wisdom and a source of inspiration.

The Qur’an therefore becomes the only truly normative source for Islam. This is a “*sola scriptura*” that is not without influences from the Protestant model (some modernists are happy to be called the “Luthers of Islam”). This liberation from the shackles of tradition permits the hypothesis of a new exegesis of the Qur’an, which is being called for today by some Muslim intellectuals. The “occasions of

revelation,” drawn from the hadith, are no longer the privileged method of exegesis as they were in the past. A critical exegesis has now become possible.

This open position nevertheless has the repercussion of placing the modernist Muslim intellectuals at the margins of the general current of Islam, which remains overwhelmingly bound to the sunna as a norm of faith and law organically connected to the Qur’an. This makes it clear that the different ways in which Muslims understand tradition are at the heart of the current crisis of Islam.

In conclusion, I add two personal observations, taken from my personal research on the Qur’an.

In the first place, the critical study of the text of the Qur’an leads to an understanding of certain important verses that is completely different from the one developed over the course of the centuries in the Muslim exegetical tradition. I will give a particularly significant example, the verse that is called “of abrogation”: “Whatever message we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring one better than it or one like it” (Qur’an 2:106). This verse has always been understood, in the classical exegetical tradition, in the sense that one verse of the Qur’an can abrogate another with which it finds itself in contradiction, and the abrogating verse is obviously supposed to come later than the abrogated one.

But read in its literary context, it becomes absolutely clear that this verse is not talking about the abrogation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, but of the abrogation of certain verses of the Jewish Torah—and not of the Torah as a whole—by the Qur’an. The question is therefore shifted from the area of Muslim law (what are the Qur’anic norms that are abrogated by others that came later in time?) to the problems relative to relations between Islam and Judaism, and their respective Scriptures. The theory of the abrogation of the Qur’an by itself, developed by the legal experts, *fuqaha*, has no foundation in the Qur’an.

In the second place, the tradition of Qur’anic interpretation has always been very distrustful of any reference to previous texts, to a tradition greater than the Qur’an. During the first generations, some commentators on the Qur’an consulted the “Jewish sources,” the *isra’iliyyat*, but later these were rejected as suspect, because of the supposed falsification, *tahrif*, of the Torah. And besides, as soon as reve-

lation is understood as dictation coming directly from God, any recourse to scriptural antecedents becomes superfluous.

In reality, the current textual study increasingly demonstrates how close the connection is between the Qur'anic text and an extremely rich and variegated cultural context, knowledge of which is seen to be indispensable for understanding all of the semantic subtleties of the Qur'anic text.

CHAPTER 7



On Muslim and Catholic Approaches to Sacred Hermeneutics

AREF ALI NAYED

UNDER THE TITLE “Islam Has Its Luthers, Too. But Reform Is Far Away”, Sandro Magister writes: “At the heart of the current crisis in the Muslim world are the different conceptions of tradition. And the refusal to interpret the Qur’an with scientific as well as theological methods [...] The question of tradition [...] seems to be even more burning for Islam. This is tightly interwoven with the question of the interpretation of the Qur’an. The fundamentalist currents inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, idealize the original Islam, taking it as their only model and refusing to apply to the Qur’an the criteria of scientific as well as theological interpretation. Muslims who interpret the Qur’an using methods similar to those applied to the Bible by Christian exegesis are few and far between. The great centers of Islamic theology, like Al-Azhar University in Cairo, are very distrustful of the modern methodologies of literary analysis. The fruits of a critical interpretation of the Qur’an come almost exclusively from non-Muslim scholars”.

Magister then offers “The lesson of a great Islamologist, Michel Cuypers” in the form of a presentation under the title: “Tradition as seen by the Muslim faith, yesterday and today”. The way Magister sees it, “At the conclusion (of that presentation), Cuypers shows how important it is that the Muslim world open itself to a critical interpretation of the Qur’an”.

The spirit of Magister’s introduction, and the way he reads the concluding part of Cuypers’ piece share the same attitude that some

Catholic scholars and officials have sometimes expressed, in recent years, regarding the Qur'an and its interpretation.

They speak from the same self-righteous vantage point that in the recent past made the ill-founded claim, that Catholic-Muslim dialogue is hindered by Muslim belief that the Qur'an is the very speech of God. It is important to point out, yet again, that such a claim clearly suffers from being stuck in a double bind: First, the bind of misunderstanding and misrepresenting Islamic teachings regarding the Qur'an. Second, the bind of misrepresenting Catholic doctrine on Christian Scriptures, through false contrast. Let me explain how this double bind works.

The Qur'an is the very discourse (*kalam*) of our Exalted One God (Allah), as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and as faithfully preserved through uninterrupted communal transmission (*tawatur*). The Qur'an is eternal (*qadim*) in essence, origin, and as essential divine discourse competence (*kalamullah* as *kalam nafsi*). It is, however, also historical in its unfolding, as revelatory performance (*kalamullah* as *kalam lafzi*), and was revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) in intimate engagement with the historical and living circumstances and events of the Muslim community (*tanzil* and *tanjim*). (For more on this, see *Al-Insaf* of Imam Abu Bakr Al-Baqilani, d. 1013 CE.)

Muslim scholars have always based their interpretations and exegeses of the Qur'an on the bases of several sciences, including the science of the "circumstances of revelation" (*Asbab al-Nuzul*), on the science of the history of the Qur'an (*Tarikh al-Qur'an*), and on the careful study of the linguistic modes familiar to the Arabs around the time of revelation (*ulum al-lugha*). Muslim scholars developed a comprehensive apparatus of historical-critical-linguistic methodologies for understanding the Qur'an (*Ulum al-Qur'an*). (For more on this, see *Al-Itqan* of Imam Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti (c. 1445–1505 CE).

Muslim scholars were always aware of the fact that interpretation, understanding, and exegesis of God's eternal discourse are forms of human strenuous striving (*ijtihad*) that must be dutifully renewed in every believing generation. Solemn belief in the eternity and divine authorship of the Qur'an never prevented Muslim scholars from dealing with it historically and linguistically. On the contrary, belief in the

revelatory truth of the Qur'an was the very motivation for spending life-times in close scholarly study of God's discourse. (For more on this see *Kitab Al-ʿIlm* of Imam Ibn Abd Al-Barr)

Massive libraries of interpretative and exegetical discourses—theological, juridical, ethical, or spiritual—were worked out by successive generations of Muslim scholars from the earliest times up to today. It is precisely on the basis of their solemn belief that the Qur'an is the very speech of God that Muslim scholars, through the ages, engaged Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Buddhist, and even skeptical and naturalist scholars in dialogue. All the major manuals of Muslim theology, be they Maturidi, Ash'ari, Mu'tazili, Ja'fari, Isma'ili, or Ibadi exhibit remarkable broadness of vision and actively engage the beliefs of philosophers, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus, and Buddhists.

Interestingly, the exegetical Muslim historical-critical-linguistic apparatus, in synthesis with ancient Talmudic methodologies (such as the hermeneutic rules of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Ishmael), was transmitted through Sephardic Jewish scholars such as Hasdai ben Abraham Crescas (c. 1340–1410/1411) and Baruch de Spinoza (1632–1677) to the earliest Protestant hermeneutical masters (such as Johann August Ernesti [1707–1781]). The “High Criticism” and “Historical-Critical Method” that stemmed from Protestant Reformation hermeneutics were directly influenced by Spinoza's ultimately Andalusian Talmudic hermeneutics which was steeped in the Qur'anic hermeneutics of Andalusian Muslim scholars.

It is also interesting to commentary that the methodologies and conclusions of the Protestant High Criticism were, for several centuries, rejected by the Catholic Church. This rejection was most systematic and explicit in Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) and Pope Pius X's Anti-modernist *Pascendi Dominica Gregis* (1907).

Under the tremendous pressures of Protestant biblical scholarship, the Catholic Church finally, but only grudgingly, partially, and conditionally, accepted some aspects of the historical-critical method. Pope Benedict XV did start this process of conditional acceptance in *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920), but it was not until Pope Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) that Catholic scholars were finally allowed to catch up with the advanced state of Protestant biblical studies.

Thus, it is quite ironic some Catholic scholars now accuse Muslims of an imaginary closure that more accurately describes the Vatican's own pre-1943 closure to historical-critical methodologies.

What is even more ironic is the fact that some Catholics, not only imagine such Muslim closure, but go on to attribute it to the Muslim belief in the divine authorship of the Qur'an (i.e., that the Qur'an is the very speech of God). This is very strange indeed, and comes down to thinking that one who believes in the divine authorship of a sacred text can not possibly be a dialogue partner on theological matters!

In making this strange claim about the Muslim creed regarding the Qur'an, some Catholics seem to forget the Roman Catholic dogmatic position regarding Christian Scriptures. Since at least the Council of Trent, the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church has again and again reaffirmed a very strong, dictation-like, position regarding divine revelation, and has always maintained that the "holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see *John* 20:31; 2 *Tim.* 3:16; 2 *Peter* 1:19–20, 3:15–16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself" (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, Chapter III.).

Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) makes it clear that a strong belief in the divine authorship of the Christian Scriptures has been 'perpetually held and professed' by the Church:

This supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, is contained both in unwritten Tradition, and in written Books, which are therefore called sacred and canonical because, being written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author and as such have been delivered to the Church. This belief has been perpetually held and professed by the Church in regard to the books of both Testaments; and there are well-known documents of the gravest kind, coming down to us from the earliest times, which proclaim that God, who spoke first by the Prophets, then by his own mouth, and lastly by the Apostles, composed also the Canonical Scriptures, and that these are his own oracles and words: a letter, written by our heavenly Father, and transmitted by the sacred writers to the human race in its pilgrimage so far from its heavenly country.

It is true that the Catholic Church since 1943, and especially since the Second Vatican Council, and in light of the findings of historical-critical scholarship, began to also stress the involvement of the human authors. However, even in *Dei Verbum*, God's own inerrant authorship has always been affirmed by the Church. Even Pope Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritus* (1943) re-affirms the same creed, and expands rather than cancels the scriptural creeds of Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* (1893).

Therefore, given the dogmas of the Catholic Church regarding Christian Scriptures, it is strange, and ironic indeed, that some Catholic scholars still hold that upholding the divine authorship of a sacred text is a hindrance to theological dialogue! If such belief in divine authorship prevents its adherents from theological dialogue, then Catholic scholars would have the same dialogical inhibitions that some of them imagine Muslim scholars to have.

Furthermore, the traditional Sunni position with regards to respectfully approaching the Qur'an and tradition is not that distant from the Catholic position with regards to respectfully approaching Christian Scriptures and tradition. Pope Benedict XVI himself recently advised typical Catholic caution regarding over enthusiasm for historical-critical methodologies:

The scientific study of the sacred texts is important but is not sufficient in itself because it would respect only the human dimension. To respect the coherence of the Church's faith, the Catholic exegete must be attentive to perceiving the Word of God in these texts, within the faith of the Church herself. If this indispensable reference point is missing, the exegetical research would be incomplete, losing sight of its principal goal, and risk being reduced to a purely literary interpretation in which the true Author God no longer appears ("Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission", 23 April, 2009).

It is indeed ironic that some Catholics now advise Muslims to produce "Luthers" and "Lutheran-style" approaches to the Qur'an. Such advisors should remember the strenuous efforts of the Catholic Church to contain the consequences of upholding the (Protestant) *sola scriptura* principle.

Unfortunately, some Catholic statements regarding Muslim ap-

proaches to the Qur'an seem to be based on ill-founded "Islam versus Christianity" contrast tables developed and advocated by some "Islam experts." It is essential, for the sake of mutual-understanding, and for the sake of God, to stop making these harmful false distinctions, and to stop preaching down to Islam about the wisdom of using the historical-critical method to study the Qur'an. *And God knows best!*

PART FOUR



THE BRADLEY LECTURE

CHAPTER 8



Compassion and Understanding in Islam

THE BRADLEY LECTURE

[In May 2007, the author delivered the Bradley Lecture at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome. The text was published subsequently in Islamochristiana in vol. 33, pp. 137–148]

ISLAMIC THEOLOGY (*Kalam*) must strive to be a proactive ever-fresh articulation of the compassionate and life-giving teaching of Islam. Otherwise, *Kalam* risks being frozen into simple irrelevance despite its impressive edifice of past theological formulations.

This imperative has been deeply felt and shared by several Muslim scholars since at least the nineteenth century. It is this imperative that grounds the works of such Sunni scholars as Al-Jisr (of Syria), al-Farahi, Nu'mani, and later Iqbal (of India), al-Madani, al-Siyyadi, and then al-Nursi, Mustafa Sabri and al-Kawthary (of Turkey), Abdu (of Egypt), Ibn 'Ashur (of Tunis), and more recently Taha Abdurrahman (of Morocco). It is also the imperative that grounds the works of such Shi'i scholars as al-Afghani, Tabataba'i, Mutahari, and more recently Shabastari (all of Iran), and al-Sadr and Abduljabbar al-Rifa'i (of Iraq). This is the imperative of what has been called "New *Kalam*".

Islamic Theology must face such troubling issues as today's rampant cruelty of human beings towards human beings, and the cruelty of human beings towards other creatures and the very environment in which we all strive to live. It is this imperative that must motivate Muslims to work out well-grounded Islamic approaches to face the challenges that daunt today's troubled humanity.

I have been striving to articulate such a fresh Islamic Theology in a

way that is consistent with my North African Asha'ri/Maliki/Shadili-Rifa'i Sunni tradition, and yet open to the contributions of advances in such contemporary fields as hermeneutics, semiotics, pragmatics, and speech-act theory.

My progress has been frustratingly slow due to the massive terrain that one must cover in multiple disciplines and in multiple religious and cultural spaces, but also due to the fact that for the past nine years I have had to take care of an elaborate family enterprise in humble obedience to the command of my ailing father.

In my struggle for a fresh theological articulation, I have long been deeply aware of the immense importance of dialogical "co-theologizing", in which one articulates and elaborates one's own theology in full view of and engagement with the theological efforts of other religious and philosophical communities. It means that the Muslim scholar must elaborate a theology that is fully engaged with those of other traditions, not to mix theologies or to make hybrid, but to be responsible to the Other who is ever present as your neighbor and your friend.

I am truly pleased to be back in Rome, at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, where I spent more than two intense years during the late nineties, keeping theological and spiritually busy, while learning and teaching in the midst of a deeply Christian environment, with such great friends and colleagues as Fathers Etienne Renaud, Michel Lagarde, Maurice Borrmans, and Michael Fitzgerald.

I am also pleased to have had a chance this morning to visit the Pontifical Gregorian University, where, during the late eighties and early nineties, I eagerly attended a variety of courses, and where Father Dan Madigan is now carrying out profound dialogical theological work with a group of impressively bright young scholars.

My more recent experiences of working with Christian and Jewish scholars, such as David Ford, Peter Ochs, Ben Quash, and Oliver Davies, through the Scriptural Reasoning endeavor, and the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme (at the Faculty of Divinity in Cambridge), have repeatedly confirmed the tremendous value of elaborating one's theology in full engagement with others. I have come to believe profoundly that dialogue is a condition for the possibility of proper theologizing and not just a polite afterthought to theologizing.

However, dialogical theologizing can never be fruitful if it is not also deeply rooted in one's own tradition. I am truly grateful to my Muslim masters and teachers in Malaysia, as well as the United Arab Emirates and Libya, for having graced me with their companionship (*suhba*) and wisdom. Only through the "togetherness of love" (*al-ma'iah bil mahabbah*) is the essential connectivity with one's tradition maintained. It is not possible to rely only on books to do theology, one must be connected to a living tradition of scholarship and keep the company of scholars and maintain the proper lineage of scholarship or *sanad*.

I am glad that some Muslim friends, who are equally committed to the vision of a deeply-rooted, yet opened-ended Islamic Theology, have graced me with their presence today. I am excited that a Muslim Foundation with such a vision has been established in Abu Dhabi under the name of the Tabah Foundation by Sidi 'Ali al-Jifri (continuing the great ulema tradition of Yemen), and his colleagues, such as Sidi Jihad Brown (continuing the great ulema tradition of Syria), and is represented here with us today.

Allah, in the Qur'an, provides us with a wonderful parable (*mithal*) of what all proper theological discourse should be like: "Do you now see how Allah sets forth a parable? A wholesome word is like a wholesome tree, whose root is firm, and whose branches (reach) into heaven. It provides its fruit at all times, by leave of its Lord. Allah sets forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember" (*Sura Ibrahim* 14:24-25).

Thus all proper and wholesome theological discourse must be "a wholesome word":

1. Rooted.
2. Open-ended
3. Ever fresh and fruitful.

I believe that Islamic Theology today must strive to abide by these divine criteria. It must be firmly rooted in: the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the *Ijma'* of the Umma. It must be open-ended through the dialectical and respectful dialogue with other theologies and philosophies. It must be constantly refreshed and focused on bearing fruits that can serve the Umma and Humanity at large.

Theological rooted-ness must start with focusing on Allah himself, and the very remembrance of Him. However, this can not be done directly, for the divine essence is beyond all approaches. According to Al-Ghazali, Allah must be approached through the contemplation of His operative signs, or *ayat*, and through the remembering and proclamation of His names, as He himself has taught them to us through divine revelation. However, there are many ways of approaching divine signs, and there are many ways and names through which Allah teaches how to approach him. Each one of us must, in a sense, articulate his or her own approach to the signs or *ayat* (I shall call such an effort “ayatology”). Each one of us must also approach through the Divine Name or Names he or she finds most relevant and urgently needed by the situation and conditions of the time. I focus on the divine names *Al-Rahman* and the related *Al-Rahim* (and call such an effort “Rahmatology”).

Remembering Allah as *Al-Rahman*

Islam is a continuous prayer of remembrance. The Arabic word I have in mind when I say “remembrance” is “*dhikr*”. *Dhikr*, which comes from the root “DH.K.R”, means both “remembering” and “mentioning” or even “proclaiming”. Now, one remembers by always mentioning and proclaiming, and one mentions and proclaims because he or she remembers! To live Islam is to live in a continuous activity of remembering and mentioning.

But why all this talk of remembering and mentioning? Who are we supposed to remember, and who are we supposed to mention? The answer is simple: Allah. It is Allah, our One and Unique God and Lord that we must always remember and mention. But why do we have to actively remember and mention Allah? Is He not the most real and manifest? As Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah Iskanderi said in the *Hikam*, “*kayfa yas-tadalu alaihi, wahuwa zahir fi kulli shai*”: How can I have evidence for His existence when He is so manifest? How can that which is most real and manifest be in need of remembrance? The answer is: our need to remember and mention Allah does not arise from a lack of manifestation on His part, but from a nasty propensity to forget on our part!

Allah has created an abundance of creatures. To them all, He is real

and manifest. They all remember Him and sing His praises at all times. Unfortunately, there is only one exception to this observation: Man! Man is the only creature capable of forgetting Allah! The stones remember Allah and sing His praises (for example by following the patterns of being with which He endowed them). The birds, the clouds, the sun, and winds all do the same. They never forget Allah. But we human beings forget Allah!

But how can this be? Are we not supposed to be the most special of Allah's creatures? How can the stones and the birds be better than us? Well, the stones and the birds do not have to be better than us. We can just as continuously remember and mention Allah, if we are sufficiently vigilant and diligent. Furthermore, when we do remember and mention our Lord, we are indeed better than the stones and the birds, because we do so intentionally, while they do it automatically.

Now we begin to see that our capacity to forget, our forgetfulness, our propensity towards amnesia, if you like, is a gift from Allah! Why? Because it is the condition of making possible our intentional, deliberate, and free remembering and mentioning of Him.

But why should we remember and mention Allah? The answer is this: we should remember Him and mention Him in order to express our deep gratitude for His compassion towards us. Thus, we come to Allah's compassion (*rahma*). Unless we continuously remind ourselves and others of Allah's compassion, we would fail in our prayers to Him, in our duty to live righteously before Him.

The great sages of Islamic spirituality have passed down, through continuous chains of transmission that links us with the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) himself, various simple formulae of remembrance.

No formula is more powerful in reminding us of the compassion of Allah and the call to practice compassion than the formula: "In the Name of Allah, Merciful, Compassionate" (*Bismillahi al-Rahman al-Rahim*). This powerful, operative, and efficacious formula is demanded of a Muslim in all his or her daily acts. As one gets up, starts waking, starts eating, starts drinking, in short, starts living, he or she is to utter this daily reminder of Allah's compassion and the demands it makes on us. Master Ahmed al-Rifa'i calls this formula: "the greatest secret of Allah" (*sir Allah al-azam*).¹

Much of classical Kalam or Islamic Theology is rightly focused on the Islamic creedal formula: “There is no god but Allah” (*la ilaha illa Allah*). As the great theologian Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi says in his popular manual *Umm al-Barahin*, all theology is but an expression of the Muslim creedal formula (*shahada*).

While very much respecting all the manuals centered around the creedal formula, I truly believe that something very important can be learned and gained by re-focusing Islamic theology so that the creedal formula is approached through theological prolegomena that center around the invocation of the compassion-related names of Allah: “In the Name of Allah, Merciful, Compassionate” (*Bismillahi al-Rahman al-Rahim*) (*basmalah*). Such prolegomena I call “Rahmatology”.

Rahmatology

Allah (God), has many sublime names. The tradition of Islam teaches ninety-nine names that are commonly invoked in prayers and meditations. Of course, Allah has many more names than just the ninety-nine that are pointed to by Al-Ghazali in his *Al-Maqsad al-Asna fi Sharh Asma’ Allah al-Husna* and by Al-‘Izz Ibn Abd al-Salam in his *Shajarat al-Ma‘arif*. Approaching Allah through any particular name, or set of names, tends to flavour one’s theology.

Particular names stress particular divine attributes or characterizations (*sifat*). Theologies are often pedagogically expressed as preaching-approaches, and tend to shape the character (i.e. to “characterize”) of the devout community.

Thus, the stress on a particular name or set of names tends to shape the character of a community through the operative efficacy of that name or set of names. It is therefore important that a wholesome compassion-invoking preaching is developed based on a compassion-centered theology.

For various historical and apologetic reasons, Sunni Muslim theologies (be they of Ash‘ari or Maturidi schools, have tended to stress divine names that are associated with Knowledge, Will, and Life (*‘ilm*, *irada*, *hayat*), in addition to other names and or attributes (classical statements of the two schools stabilized around twenty such names and/or attributes).

The grand edifice of intricate theological work of the two classical

schools has become the grounding for the presuppositions of much of preaching in Muslim communities.

Of course, theologians never had a monopoly on the deeper grounding of Islamic preaching. Spiritual teachers and popular sentimental preachers have always been closer to devout communities, and have had the most influence on the characterization of communities. However, many works by spiritual teachers tend to start with canonical theological statements that are basically summaries of the great theological manuals of the Ash‘aris and the Maturidis.

The fact that spiritual teachings were often richer and more abundant than the extensive, but still limited scope of the manuals of theologies has often left spiritual preaching without clearly articulated roots in systematic theological doctrines. The very praxis of particular spiritual masters was characterized, and characterized followers, by particular divine names, without much systematic theological articulation. Perhaps the intensive dynamics and the to-and-fro of rich spiritual lives could not really be fitted into the confines of systematic theological statements.

Several spiritual masters (Sufis), most notably Ibn al-‘Arabi and his ramified school, did develop very complex theologies of names. However—and this is most unfortunate—these theologies were not reflected back into the systematic manuals of theology, and, because of an aura of the “mysteriously esoteric”, have not had a straightforward influence on popular Islamic preaching.

For several years now, I have been trying to explore fresh ways of articulating an Islamic Theology that calls upon and invokes an essential divine name that has often been neglected in classical systematic theologies of the Ash‘ari and Maturidi schools. My focus has been—and will be here—the divine name *Al-Rahman*.

The divine name *Al-Rahman* is related to “*rahma*”. This word is very important, and is worthy of some attention. *Rahma* is derived from the root “R.H.M.” This root gives rise to a host of words including the word for the motherly “womb”, the word for one’s kinship or loved-ones, and the words that suggest the semantic fields of tenderness, kindness, gentleness, mercifulness, and benevolence.

Now, Allah has many names. They are all beautiful, and they can all be used to call upon Him. Tradition hands down ninety-nine beau-

tiful names. *Rahma*, or compassion, is involved in two very important names of Allah: *Al-Rahman* and *Al-Rahim*. As you may have noticed, both of these two names come from the root “R.H.M.” that we just mentioned.

Al-Rahman is a name that is exclusively used for Allah Himself, and cannot be used as the name of a human being. A human being can be called “Abd Al-Rahman”, i.e., “Servant of Al-Rahman”, but not “Al-Rahman”. This is because the name *Al-Rahman* does not only mean The Compassionate, but also The Source of All Compassion. It is significant that it is this name, *Al-Rahman* that is said to be fully interchangeable with Allah. Allah says in the Qur’an: “Call upon Allah or call upon *Al-Rahman* for all the beautiful names are His”.

Al-Rahim also means “The Compassionate”, and is a frequently used name of Allah. However, this name can be shared by human beings. A human being can, and should be *rahim*, that is, compassionate. It is significant to note that while Allah reserves the status of being The Source of Compassion to Himself, He expects us to share with Him the quality of being compassionate. He demands it of us. Of course, as human beings, we can never be compassionate the way He is compassionate, but we can still be humanly compassionate.

It is also significant that one of the names of the Prophet Muhammad is *Al-Rahim*. It is Allah Himself who gave him that name when He said of Muhammad in the Qur’an that “He is kind (*ra’uf*) and compassionate (*rahim*)”.

What is interesting about the Prophet Muhammad, and all the other Prophets of Allah, including Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Zakaria, and ‘Isa, is that they are all both compassionate beings and living “compassions” of Allah. Each Prophet is a compassion, because he is sent to his community by Allah, who, as *The Compassionate Source of All Compassion*, wishes to save humanity and to show them the way back to their Maker.

The Qur’an considers each Prophet a “compassion” (*rahma*) of His, and each Heavenly Book sent with each Prophet, in order to guide people, is also a compassion. Allah calls the Qur’an, in the Qur’an itself, “a guidance (*huda*) and a compassion (*rahma*)”.

Allah’s giving of His many compassions as Prophets and as Heavenly Books stems from His very Essence as *Al-Rahman*, and is the ful-

fillment of a commitment, which He primordially made to Himself to be compassionate. As He says in the Qur'an: "Your Lord committed Himself to compassion (*rahma*) ..." It is on the basis of this commitment that Allah demands that we ourselves, as far as is humanly possible, respond to His compassion. Our responding to Allah's compassion must be in the very living and exercise of compassion towards His creatures.

In the Qur'an, Allah's compassion is said to be so broad as to be all-encompassing: "He encompasses everything in compassion (*rahma*) ..." It is on the basis of the broadness of His compassion that Allah demands that we ourselves, as far as is humanly possible, should embrace as many of Allah's creatures as we can with our compassion.

It is very clear from the Qur'an and the Hadith of Allah's Prophet that dealing with others in compassion is a condition for our very salvation. The Prophet says: "A man is not saved through his own work, but through the compassion (*rahma*) of Allah". He also clearly says: "No compassion will be shown (by Allah) to one who is not compassionate". To enjoy Allah's compassion, we must treat others with compassion. A good number of hadiths of the Prophet make clear that Allah will regard any cruelty towards his creatures as a cruelty against Himself. Allah is said to regard the withholding of water and food from a human being as the withholding of them from Allah Himself. Allah is also said to consider the starvation of a single cat to be sufficient grounds for eternal damnation, and the saving of a single thirsty dog to be sufficient grounds for eternal salvation. Allah says that the murdering of a single human soul is equivalent to the slaughter of the whole of Humanity.

In an important hadith of the Prophet, it is said that when Allah created the world. He kept 99% of His Compassion to Himself (as *Al-Rahman*, The Source of Compassion), and spread 1% of it in His creation. Even the animals are said to have a share of this "piece" of Allah's Compassion. Thus, even the compassion that keeps a horse from stepping or kicking its offspring is said to come from that 1% of Allah's total Compassion. As for the 99% of the compassion, we are promised that it will be available for the faithful on the Day of Judgment.

The Hadith is significant, for it says that each one of us has a man-

ifestation of Allah's very own essential compassion within us, and that each one of us has the opportunity and the duty to cultivate and actualize that divine compassion in his or her life and in his or her dealings with others. Thus, the cruelty that we sadly practice and witness every day consists in nothing short of the forsaking of the most precious trust Allah has put into our hearts when He created us: His very own compassion (*rahma*).

Now, what are we to do with this compassion that has been primordially and essentially gifted to us? Well, I can think of at least four things that we must do:

1. Continuously remember Allah and his compassion toward us.
2. Live in gratitude (*shukr*) for Allah's compassion.
3. Ask for more of Allah's compassion (*du'a*).
4. Ask forgiveness for our forgetfulness and cruelty (*istigfar/tawba*).
5. Live as intensely as possible in mutual compassion (*Tarahum*).

Now, the list of things to do may very well sound sensible and fairly straightforward. However, it is an amazing challenge to keep up the daily discipline of not forgetting Allah as *Al-Rahman*, and not forgetting to live compassionately. This is why a proper daily practice of *dhikr*, or remembrance, is very much needed. This is also why the continuous meditations about divine manifestations and signs of compassion must be cultivated.

Through the continuous meditations of the Compassionate formula, we can remember Allah, because in His Compassion and Kindness, He did not abandon us to our tendencies toward amnesia, but sought from the beginning and always, to remind us of Himself. It is true that man is "thrown into history" as some existentialists say. However, it is not true that man is "abandoned" in history, as they usually assume. Because Allah loves humanity, and because He looks at it with the eye of compassion (*rahma*), Allah reminds it of Himself all the time. Allah's reminders take many forms, and these are worthy of some consideration.

Meditation upon the Compassionate formula reminds us that Allah did not thrust us into an inert silent "natural" world. Contrary to ide-

ologies of contemporary physics, the universe is not indifferent matter or even energy. Rather, it is a domain filled with *ayat*, or divine operative signs. Now, the notion of *aya* is quite important, and quite complex, we can only touch upon it very briefly. An *aya* is an item created by Allah, and that manifests Him in several ways. First, the *aya* manifests Allah as its maker just as a beautiful human artifact somehow embodies and exhibits the “craftsmanship” of its human maker. It should be noted that the manifestation of the craftsmanship is not the result of a “deduction” nor of an “induction”, but of an immediate “seeing” or “sensing”. Looking at even a simple creature of Allah, even something as simple as a virus, one is struck by the craftsmanship manifest in it.

Secondly, an *aya* is reminiscent of Allah in that it is operative. The universe is not only full of stuff. It is full of operators, or agents; ants that “do” things, bacteria that “do” things, and even crystals that “do” things. If one still has eyes to see, and has not been blinded by God-less science, one cannot but be struck by the operability, or agency, exhibited by Allah’s creatures. This operability is His very own operability and agency. Every activity that we see serves as a reminder of the One Source of all activity: Allah Himself.

Thirdly, an *aya* reminds us of Allah in so far as it is transformative of us. The mundane “modern” way of taking knowledge to be the activity of a human “subject” upon an inert “object” is truly misguided. Can knowledge really take place if the so-called “object” were not really transforming us, changing us, at least in small ways, thereby making us its “objects” in the very activity of knowing? Sometimes the transformation affected in us by a single creature of Allah is so overwhelming and drastic, we cannot help but feel Allah’s own transformative power through it.

It is often repeated in the Qur’an that the *ayat* of Allah include His creatures, the so-called “natural” world. The sky, the trees, the camels, the rain, the sun, the moon, the clouds, and, of course, human beings themselves, are all quoted as examples of *ayat* that serve as reminders to us of our Maker.

Important as what we may call the “creaturely” *ayat* are, they do not exhaust the whole of Allah’s operative signs. From the beginning, and up to the time of Muhammad (peace be upon him!), Allah kept

sending human beings to remind other human beings of their One Maker and Lord. These specially chosen human beings were called Prophets (*anbiyya*) and Messengers (*rusul*). Their most important function was that of reminding people of Allah.

In the Qur'an, Allah tells Muhammad, the last of His Prophets, to remind the people of Him and instructs him, "So remind, for you are but a reminder". Muhammad was told to say to the people, "This the reminder that is with me, and the reminder that was with the ones before ..."

After the Prophets, and especially after Muhammad, the last of the Prophets, Allah keeps on reminding us through saints (*awliya*). These are followers of the Prophets that do not receive a direct articulated revelation like the Prophets, but who, nevertheless, receive a "light" and a "guidance" that enables them to shine forth and remind others of Allah. In effect, the Prophets and their followers, the saints, are living *ayat*, gifted to us by Allah Himself so as to remind us of the fact that He is our Creator and Lord.

Creaturely *ayat*, and human *ayat*, are not the only *ayat*, of Allah. Allah also gifted many examples of another type of *ayat*: Heavenly Books. These are fully articulated linguistic reminders, which Allah sends to humanity with His Prophets. Examples are the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Qur'an. These *ayat* have an interesting feature. They endure after the Prophet himself has passed away, and serve generation after generation of believers. These books, in a sense, embody the Prophetic message, and serve as continuous reminders to us all of our One Maker: Allah.

Finally, let us not forget another important type of *ayat*: the faithful followers of the Prophets of Allah. Any human being who truly follows a Prophet of Allah, not through mere talk, but through actual living, acts thereby as a living reminder of Allah. That is why the company of genuinely faithful people is a blessing and an effective way to the Lord.

Ayatology

We now come to the Arabic-Greek hybrid "Ayatology". It is from the Arabic *aya* (divine transforming indicator or sign) and the Greek "logos" invoking a likening to two projects: The "Monadology" of

Leibniz, and the “Phenomenology” of Husserl. Ayatology is both an “Ontology” and a disciplined “way of seeing”.

Ayatology is an Islamic Theology that begins with Allah as *al-Rahman* (the source of all compassion) and is hence ultimately deeply related to Rahmatology. Allah’s compassion is manifest dynamically, actively and continuously in transformative processes that keep indicating Him all the time. These processes are called *ayat*. These processes can be seen as activities and sometime as “things”. Ayatology as Ontology attempts to offer typologies of *ayat* and describe how we can account for “things”, “events”, “acts”, and “artifacts”.

Ayat, as divine indicative and transforming activities, demand human engagement. This engagement is dynamic and dialogical. It is dialogical in that it is an active mutually transforming exchange between the “seer”, himself or herself being an *aya*, and the *ayat* that he or she happens to be considering. It is also dialogical in the literal sense of involving other human *ayat*, who are themselves striving to engage the same *ayat* or other similar *ayat*. Ayatology attempts to offer typologies of modes of *ayat*-engagement and how they work.

The engagement of *ayat* is not only a cognitive activity, but a deeply spiritual one. This activity is based in *qalb* (heart) and is utterly central to our very being as human beings. Ayatology attempts to offer a characterization of the “pure and/or meek of heart” that can best understand and be transformed by *ayat*. Thus, the disciplined way of seeing, which it tries to learn, is spiritual and not merely cognitive.

By its very dialogical nature and foundation, Ayatology demands to be worked out in dialogue with other human beings, for whom divine signs and indicators, with their transformative and redemptive significance, are important.

Now, all of the divine signs considered above are signs of divine compassion. Attentiveness to these signs and their reality as manifestations of compassion that call us to compassion is key to living compassionately. The continuous remembrance of Allah as *al-Rahman al-Rahim* is key to the continuous remembrance of Allah’s compassion towards us, and the call to the continuous practice of compassion toward others.

We may now ask the question: “Isn’t such continuous remembrance and practice of compassion an abstract ideal that can never be lived?”

The answer is “yes”, it is an ideal. However, great sages have practiced it in the past and it can still be achieved now and in the future. Between the Islamic years of 512 and 578 AH (1118–1181 CE)—there lived a man in the Wasit area of Iraq called Ahmed al-Rifaʿi. This man was a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence of the school of Shafiʿi. This sage is an example of someone who actually practiced remembrance and compassion. I have recently started to study his life and works with a view to developing a more concrete and rooted Theology of Compassion and an associated Preaching of Compassion that will hopefully be translated into a praxis of compassion in my own life and the life of others. I have not come across translations of Rifaʿi’s works. Therefore, I thought it a good idea to close this paper with a couple of passages that I translated for you. The point is very simple: this is a clear example of what a compassionate person living in compassion would look like!

—Master Yaqub (Blessed is his essence!) said, “One day, after just finishing the call for the midday prayer, and still standing, I was called by Master Ahmed al-Rifaʿi (May Allah be pleased with him!), so I went to him. He said to me, ‘Come down here, for Allah’s sake!’ So, I found him sitting near the niche, and on his hand was a small living creature, smaller than a mosquito. It was so small you couldn’t see its members. He said to me, ‘Yaʿqub, look at this!’ So I looked, and was amazed at it and its makeup. I said: ‘What did Allah (exalted) intend by creating this thing? What benefit can come of it?’ He said, ‘Yaʿqub, ask Allah (exalted) for forgiveness. The True (glorified) intended showing us His creativity, and the efficacy of His power. There is great wisdom in this.’ Then he said, ‘Oh, Yaʿqub, if someone tells you that there is a creature weaker than this little-nothing-little-Ahmed [himself], do not believe him!’”²

—“In Umm Ubaida there was a diseased dog so severely afflicted; its skin was decomposing and it went blind. It was running around, and people found it hard to look at it. So, it was taken out and thrown outside Umm Ubaida. Master al-Rifaʿi learned about the condition of the dog, so he started to take a lamp and go to the dog. He used to take with him ointment and medicine and treat it. He also used to take bread and water to it. He even made a shack to provide shade from the sun. He kept frequenting the dog until it was cured. He then heated

up water, and took it up to the dog, and washed it. He kept giving bread and water to the dog”.³

—Master Miqdam said, “I was with Mahan and Master Ahmed al-Rifa‘i (Allah be pleased with him!), one day, the time of the morning prayer. It was a very cold day. He had finished the ritual wash for prayers, but was still sitting. We kept waiting for him to get up. Our wait continued, his arm was extended outwards and he was not moving. We did not know why he was still sitting. We went to see why he was still sitting. When we got closer, we could see that there was a tiny mosquito on his hand. The mosquito had drunk of his blood until it became red. It turned out that he was still sitting for the mosquito's sake. When we moved, it went away. When that happened, he was not pleased. He said: ‘Allah gave it nourishment from me, and you deprived it from having it’”.⁴

—He used to say, “Kindness towards the creatures of Allah gets one closer to Allah (exalted). It is said in the tradition: ‘Creatures are Allah’s dependants. He who benefits His dependents the most is most beloved to Him’”.⁵

—Master Ahmed said, “I tried out every path. I could not find a closer, easier and better one than: meekness, poverty, and brokenness [before Allah], respect for Allah’s command, kindness to Allah’s creatures, and the following of the example of my Master the Messenger of Allah (Peace and blessings upon him!)”.⁶

Seeing how such sages as al-Rifa‘i lived, I strive to keep my heart-sight on Allah throughout the commotion and flux I see in my outer and inner travels, because I see everything as an *aya* (or operative sign) of Allah. The Qur’an, itself a sequence of *ayat* (operative signs), speaks about and illustrates the transformative power of *ayat* on every page.

The Qur’an teaches me to see the mountains, the heavens and the earth as *ayat* of Allah. It teaches me how to see processes of alteration and growth as *ayat*. It teaches me to see the Prophets of Allah and the heavenly books that are given as *ayat*. It illustrates the operative capacity of Allah’s *ayat* by calling the *asa* of Musa that becomes a snake, and that opens up the sea an *aya*. I strive to see the operative signs of my Lord everywhere. I strive to be constantly aware of God’s presence.

The Qur’an further teaches me that besides the outer *ayat* (*ayat* of

the horizons), there are also inner *ayat* (*ayat* within persons). The more I manage to bear the Qur'an, the more I become a wonder-struck watcher of the signs of my Lord that operate within and upon my own soul. My appreciation of the *ayat* within me lead me to wonder about and appreciate the operative *ayat* in the persons around me. I also come to see others as divine signs.

The world, my soul, and all other persons become an ocean with an incredible variety of *ayat*. I learn from the Qur'an to live concretely the realization that diversity is a wonderful gift. I experience, first-hand, the fact that my Lord celebrates the variety that is present in things ranging from trees, to different types of honey, to clouds, to people themselves.

Seeing variety as a divinely-gifted operative sign in things and persons, I respect it, cherish it and celebrate it. This seeing increasingly becomes a seeing "with the eye of compassion" (*bi'ayn al-rahma*). It is a seeing that is the condition of making possible all proper theological thinking and more importantly, living.

May Allah bless and encompass us all with His infinite compassion.

NOTES

¹ Ahmed al-Rifa'i, *Al-Kulyat al-Ahmadiyah*, ed. Muhammad Abul-Huda al-Siadi (Cairo: Maktabat al-Tagafa al-Dinyah, 2004), 104. Other works by Ahmed al-Rifa'i include: *Al-Burhan al-Mu'ayad* (Aleppo: Dar al-Qalam al-Arabi, 2004); *Halat Ahl al-Haqiqah ma' Allah (azza wa jail)* (Aleppo: Dar al-Qalam al-Arabi, 2004); *Hikam al-imam al-Rifa'i* (Aleppo: Dar al-Qalam al-Arabi, 2002); *Al-Kulyat al-Ahmadiyah*, ed. Muhammad Abul-Huda al-Siadi (Cairo: Maktabat al-Tagafa al-Dinyah, 2004); and *Al-Nidam al-Khas li-Ahl al-lkhtisas* (Aleppo: Dar al-Qalam al-Arabi, 2002).

² Muhammad Abul-Huda al-Siadi, *Qiladat al-Jawahir* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Rifa'i, 2004), 90. Other works by Muhammad Abul-Huda al-Siadi on Al-Rifa'i and his Order include: *Al-Hikam al-Mihdawiah* (Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2005); *Al-Tariqah al-Rifa'iah* (Dar al-Biruni, Damascus, 2002); and *Wasilat al-A'rifin* (Dar al-Basha'ir, Damascus, 2005).

³ Al-Siadi, *Qiladat al-Jawahir*, 92.

⁴ Ibid., 93.

⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁶ Ibid., 97.

PART FIVE



THE YALE CONFERENCE

CHAPTER 9



The Same God?

YALE CONFERENCE

[The following paper was presented by the author at a conference organized by the Yale Divinity School on the theme “Same God?” on 23–24 September 2009]

DO JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MUSLIM worship the same God?’ In so far as anyone truly worships, and worships the One who is truly God, everyone worships the same God. There is only one true and real God, and all human hearts are endowed with the gift of deeply seeking Him. So, Yes, Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship the same God, in so far as their worship is sincerely genuine, and in so far as they worship the one true and real God.

Furthermore, worship is not just a subject-activity of devotion. More fundamentally, it is an attractive and awe-inspiring manifestation of the one true and real God to the sincerely genuine heart. In so far as the true and real God makes Himself known (*taʿruf*) to the heart, that manifestation, experienced subjectively as worship, is real. In so far as the One Lord makes Himself truly known to the hearts of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the reference of their worship is one.

On the other hand, as Muslim sages, such as al-Rifaʿi and al-Sanusi, rightly point out: “The ways to the Lord are as many as the breaths of creatures!’ In every breath, each heart has a unique way to the Lord. (*Al-burhan al-Muʾayyad, Al-Salsabil al-Maʿin*)

Each moment of worship of each devoted heart is unique. While the reference of the intentional activity of genuine worship is always the same, the senses of God that appear in the heart, of even a single

worshipper, are greatly varied. So, even when a single worshipper worships the same God, his senses of God, in the complex activities called “worshipping”, are varied.

It is to be expected then, that Jews, Christians, and Muslims would have different senses of the one true and real God, even as they share Him as a genuine reference. In his famous 1892 paper *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (On Sense and Reference), Gottlob Frege says:

Let a, b, c be the lines connecting the vertices of a triangle with the mid-points of the opposite sides. The point of intersection of a and b is then the same as the point of intersection of b and c. So we have different designations for the same point, and these names (“point of intersection of a and b”, “point of intersection of b and c”) likewise indicate the mode of presentation; and hence the statement contains actual knowledge.

It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, letter), besides that to which the sign refers, which may be called the reference of the sign, also what I should like to call the sense of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained. In our example, accordingly, the reference of the expressions “point of intersection of a and b” and “point of intersection of b and c” would be the same, but not their senses. The reference of “evening star” would be the same as that of “morning star”, but not the sense.¹

Thus, the one true and real God is the very reference of all possible, sincerely genuine, activities of worship—be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. However, there are multiplicities of the senses of the Lord as ‘modes of presentation’ to the multitude of hearts, and these senses are as varied as the breaths of creatures, and may very well have family resemblances associated with the complex semiotic, linguistic, and cultural worlds of each one of the three religions, and with the sub-worlds of sub-communities within those religion.

It is important to point out, that though our senses of the Lord may very well point to Him as our ultimate reference, no human sense of Him can ever capture or contain the one true and real God. Even the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) readily acknowledges “we have not known You as You ought to truly be known, and have not worshiped You as You ought to truly be worshipped”. As Muslim Ash‘arite theologians are fond of pointing out: “Let there be any sense of Him in your mind. Well, He is different from that!”

THE SAME GOD?

Although we are not united in our senses of the one true and real God, we are indeed united in Him as the very same genuine reference of all our varied activities of worship, provided that they are sincerely genuine, and that they are directed to Him alone.

The fact that the one true and real God is the unique reference and focus of all activities of sincerely genuine worship brings us to the most serious problematic associated with the question: "Do Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship the same God?" That problematic is clearest when one starts with the various communal teachings regarding God enshrined in what are called creeds.

Judging by the widely accepted creeds expressing each one of the Abrahamic faiths, it is clear that Jews and Muslims do worship the same God. They share Him, not only as a unique reference, but even their senses of Him are remarkably close. Apart from important differences about the Torah, the Covenant, and the Prophecy of Muhammad (peace be upon Him), the creeds of such eminent Jewish scholars as Moses ben Mimon (Maimonides), Hasdai ben Abraham Crescas, and Joseph Albo are readily acceptable to a Muslim theologian. The most extensive of the Jewish creeds is the famous *Shelosha-asr Ikkarim* (the thirteen principles) of Maimonides:

13 Principles of Faith:

1. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the Creator and Guide of everything that has been created; He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.
2. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is One, and that there is no unity in any manner like His, and that He alone is our God, who was, and is, and will be.
3. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, has no body, and that He is free from all the properties of matter, and that there can be no (physical) comparison to Him whatsoever.
4. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the first and the last.
5. I believe with perfect faith that to the Creator, Blessed be His Name, and to Him alone, it is right to pray, and that it is not right to pray to any being besides Him.
6. I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true.
7. I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was true, and that he was the chief of the

- prophets, both those who preceded him and those who followed him.
8. I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that is now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses our teacher, peace be upon him.
 9. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be exchanged, and that there will never be any other Torah from the Creator, Blessed be His Name.
 10. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, knows all the deeds of human beings and all their thoughts, as it is written, "Who fashioned the hearts of them all, Who comprehends all their actions" (*Psalms* 33:15).
 11. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those that transgress them.
 12. I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming.
 13. I believe with perfect faith that there will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, Blessed be His name, and His mention shall be exalted for ever and ever.²

Now, as a Muslim I readily accept all of the thirteen principles, except for 7, 8, and 9, which cannot be accepted because of the reality and normativity of the Prophecy of Muhammad (peace be upon Him). However, all of Maimonides' principles of faith pertaining to God Himself are readily acceptable and completely shared by Muslim theologians of all major schools.

Now, considering authoritative Christian creeds, gives rise to a seriously different situation. After the destruction of the Church of Jerusalem that was headed by James the Just, the theological perspective of Paul, through complicated historical and political developments, came to dominate Christian "orthodoxy". Let us look at an authoritative Creed that resulted from that complicated process: the Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque vult*). I choose this particular creed because it really brings home the Trinitarian doctrines that clearly distinguish Christian from Muslim worship.

Athanasian Creed

1. Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.

THE SAME GOD?

2. Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.
3. Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.
4. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another.
5. But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty.
6. What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit.
7. Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit.
8. The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite.
9. Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit: And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal; as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited.
10. Almighty is the Father; almighty is the Son; almighty is the Spirit: And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty.
11. Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God: And yet there are not three gods, but one God.
12. Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord: And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord.
13. As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.
14. The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten; the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father; the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son.
15. Thus there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three spirits.
16. And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and co-equal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.
17. Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.
18. It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ became flesh.
19. For this is the true faith that we believe and confess: That our Lord

- Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man.
20. He is God, begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father, and he is man, born in the world from the being of his mother—existing fully as God, and fully as man with a rational soul and a human body; equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity.
 21. Although he is God and man, he is not divided, but is one Christ.
 22. He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity.
 23. He is completely one in the unity of his person, without confusing his natures.
 24. For as the rational soul and body are one person, so the one Christ is God and man.
 25. He suffered death for our salvation. He descended into hell and rose again from the dead.
 26. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 27. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 28. At his coming all people shall rise bodily to give an account of their own deeds.
 29. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.
 30. This is the catholic faith.
 31. One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.³

Apart from the important partial opening “We worship one God”, and the closing remarks acknowledging the resurrection of the dead and ultimate divine judgment, a Muslim cannot accept, and must actually reject the entire creed!

It is clear from the Athanasian Creed that a Muslim's worship is different from that of a Trinitarian Christian not only at the level of sense, but also at the level of reference. When the Christian insists that “Jesus is God”, he makes his reference of worship a reference that cannot possibly be shared by the Muslim. A Muslim must reject Jesus as a reference of worship because Jesus is a man, who is a blessed Prophet and Messenger (peace be upon him), but is definitely not God.

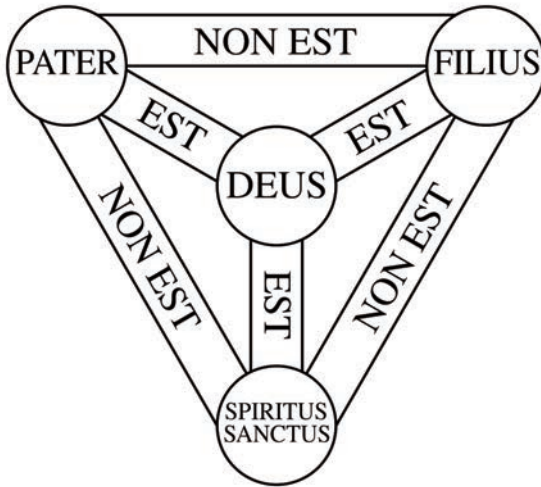
This point is made very clear in the Qur'an, and in very strong language that cannot be circumvented or fudged through any hermeneutical or metaphysical workarounds. Quoting the Holy Qur'an 5:72:

THE SAME GOD?

72. They do blaspheme who say: “God is Christ the son of Mary”. But said Christ: “O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord”. Whoever joins other gods with God—God will forbid him the garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong-doers be no one to help.
73. They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them.
74. Why turn they not to God, and seek His forgiveness? For God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.
75. Christ the son of Mary was no more than an apostle; many were the apostles that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how God doth make His signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth!
76. Say: “Will ye worship, besides God, something which hath no power either to harm or benefit you? But God—He it is that heareth and knoweth all things.”
77. Say: “O people of the Book! Exceed not in your religion the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by—who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the even way”.⁴

The fact of the matter must, regrettably, be stated bluntly: the very central dogma of a Trinitarian Christian—The Trinity—involves, as far as Islam is concerned, the gravely mistaken deification of a man, and the setting of him as an additional reference of worship besides God. Thus, when Jesus is worshiped as God, Muslims must part way with the Christians and definitely reject the worship of Jesus. Yet, Muslims must not part way with the Christians in so far as, and to the extent that, they do worship the one true God. Thus, there is a shared reference (the one true and real God), and an unshared reference (Jesus). The same is true of the Holy Spirit.

This can be made clearer by considering a medieval Christian symbol that was, and is still, used to visually summarize the Athanasian Creed. The symbol was called the *Scutum Fidei*, and is now often referred to as the Shield of the Trinity:



Now, in so far as Christian worship is focused on the very center of the symbol, and is sincerely striving towards the one true and one God, it is indeed a worship that shares the same reference as the worship of a Muslim. However, in so far as that reference is associated with the rest of the symbol, that reference is actually associative (*shirki*), and brings other referential elements that are not shared at all by the Muslim and are solemnly rejected by the divine authority of the Qur'an and the Prophetic authority of Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is not that Christians and Muslims simply have two different senses of the same reference, as two different onlookers may have two different senses of the following same figure/reference:

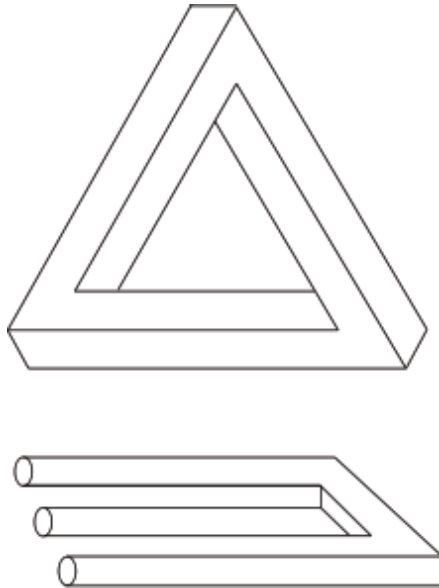


THE SAME GOD?

Rather, the Christian has a complex reference (as in the *Scutum Fidei*) that associates and integrates, with the reference shared by the Muslim, other references rejected by the Muslim as not legitimate references of worship: namely Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

As a matter of fact, because of the association and integration of illegitimate, references of worship, the Trinitarian Christian reference of worship becomes, to the Muslim, not only incomparable, but also even impossible, and therefore not comprehensible. From a Muslim's perspective, the complex reference renders the Christian sense one that is actually referring to a sort of no-sense at all.

To a Muslim a symbol of the Trinity would look less like the *Scutum Fidei*, and more like figures of "impossible objects" such as the two below:



To go back to the question of this Yale Consultation: Do Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Considering authoritative creeds: Yes, Jews and Muslims worship the same God. Also: Yes, Christians and Muslims do worship the same God, in so far as, their common reference is the one and true real God. However, in so

far as the Christian worships, as God either Jesus or the Holy Spirit, the Muslim no longer shares the same reference, and does not worship the same alleged god.

It may seem strange to say that a Muslim sees the Trinity as impossible, and yet also sees that it is indeed the reference of a Trinitarian Christian. However, Meinong's *Theory of Objects* can help us see how that can be:

The two basic theses of Meinong's theory of objects (*Gegenstandstheorie*) are (1) there are objects that do not exist and (2) every object that does not exist is yet constituted in some way or other and thus may be made the subject of true predication. Traditional metaphysics treats of objects that exist as well as of those that merely subsist (*bestehen*) but, having "a prejudice in favor of the real," tends to neglect those objects that have no kind of being at all; hence, according to Meinong, there is need for a more general theory of objects.

Everything is an object, whether or not it is thinkable (if an object happens to be unthinkable then it is something having at least the property of being unthinkable) and whether or not it exists or has any other kind of being. Every object has the characteristics it has whether or not it has any kind of being; in short, the *Sosein* (character) of every object is independent of its *Sein* (being). A round square, for example, has a *Sosein*, since it is both round and square; but it is an impossible object, since it has a contradictory *Sosein* that precludes its *Sein*.⁵

Similarly, for a Muslim, the Trinity may have a *Sosein* (what the Ash'aris would call *wujud i'tibari, la-haqiqi*, but it is an impossible object, since it has a contradictory *Sosein* (a *Sosein* that involves the contradiction Man-God). A Muslim, based on Qur'anic, Prophetic, and logical grounds, can never accept, as reference of worship, such an impossible object.

Yet, a Muslim must continue to dialogue with Trinitarian Christians, and with the Jews, for the sake and love of the One true and real God.

And God knows best!

NOTES

¹ See http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On_Sense_and_Reference

THE SAME GOD?

² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_principles_of_faith

³ See <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Statements-of-Belief/The-Athanasian-Creed.aspx>

⁴ The Holy Qur'an, 5:72–77, Yusuf Ali translation.

⁵ Roderick M. Chisholm, "Meinong, Alexius", in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan The Free Press, 1967), 261–262) (<http://www.formalontology.it/meinonga.htm>)

PART SIX



CARDINAL TAURAN AND THE
EID MESSAGE



Christians and Muslims: Called to Promote a Culture of Peace

MESSAGE FOR THE END OF RAMADAN —
EID AL FITR 1428H/2007AD BY THE PONTIFICAL
COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Dear Muslim Friends,

1. It gives me special pleasure to send you for the first time friendly and warmest greetings from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the occasion of your joyful feast of Eid al-Fitr, with which the month-long fasting and prayer of Ramadan ends. This month is always an important time for the Muslim community and gives to each individual member a new strength for their personal, family and social existence. It matters that all of us witness to our religious beliefs with a life increasingly integrated and in conformity with the Creator's plan, a life concerned with serving our brothers and sisters in ever increasing solidarity and fraternity with members of other religions and all men of good will, in the desire to work together for the common good.

2. In the troubled times we are passing through, religious believers have, as servants of the Almighty, a duty above all to work in favour of peace, by showing respect for the convictions of individuals and communities everywhere through freedom of religious practice. Religious freedom, which must not be reduced to mere freedom of worship, is one of the essential aspects of freedom of conscience, which is the right of every individual and a cornerstone of human rights. It takes into account the requirement that a culture of peace and solidarity between men can be built in which everybody can be firmly engaged in the construction of an increasingly fraternal society, doing everything one can to reject, denounce and refuse every recourse to

violence which can never be motivated by religion, since it wounds the very image of God in man. We know that violence, especially terrorism which strikes blindly and claims countless innocent victims, is incapable of resolving conflicts and leads only to a deadly chain of destructive hatred, to the detriment of mankind and of societies.

3. As religious believers, it's up to us all to be educators of peace, of human rights, of a freedom which respects each person, but also to ensure increasingly strong social bonds, because man must take care of his human brothers and sisters without discrimination. No individual in the national community should be excluded on the grounds of his or her race, religion, or any other personal characteristic. Together, as members of different religious traditions, we are called to spread a teaching which honours all human creatures, a message of love between individuals and peoples. We are particularly responsible for ensuring that our young people, who will be in charge of tomorrow's world, are formed in this spirit. It is above all the responsibility of families and then of those involved in the educational world, and of civic and religious authorities, all of whom have a duty to pay attention to the spread of a just teaching. They must provide everyone an education appropriate to his or her particular circumstances, especially a civic education which invites each young person to respect those around him or her, and to consider them as brothers and sisters with whom he or she is daily called to live, not in indifference, but in fraternal care. It is thus more urgent than ever to teach to the younger generations, those fundamental human, moral, and civic values which are necessary to both personal and community life. All instances of incivility must be made use of to remind the young of what is waiting for them in social life. It is the common good of every society and of the entire world which is at stake.

4. In this spirit, the pursuit and intensification of dialogue between Christians and Muslims must be considered important, in both educational and cultural dimensions. Thus all forces can be mobilized in the service of mankind and humanity so that the younger generations do not become cultural or religious blocs opposed to one another, but genuine brothers and sisters in humanity. Dialogue is the tool which can help us to escape from the endless spiral of conflict and multiple tensions which mark our societies, so that all peoples can live in seren-

EID MESSAGE

ity and peace and with mutual respect and harmony among their component groups.

To achieve this, I appeal to you with all my heart to heed my words, so that, by means of encounters and exchanges, Christians and Muslims will work together in mutual respect for peace and for a better future for all people; it will provide an example for the young people of today to follow and imitate. They will then have a renewed confidence in society and will see the advantage in belonging and taking part in its transformation. Education and example will also be a source of hope in the future for them.

5. This is the ardent hope I share with you: that Christians and Muslims continue to develop increasingly friendly and constructive relationships in order to share their specific riches, and that they will pay particular attention to the quality of the witness of their believers.

Dear Muslim Friends, once again I give you my warmest greetings on the occasion of your festival and I ask the God of Peace and Mercy to give you all, good health, serenity, and prosperity.

JEAN-LOUIS CARDINAL TAURAN, *President*
ARCHBISHOP PIER LUIGI CELATA, *Secretary*



A Muslim's Message of Thanks for the Vatican's "Message for the End of Ramadan"

AREF ALI NAYED

In the Name of God, Merciful, Compassionate

*His Eminence, Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, President,
His Excellence, Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, Secretary,
Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue,
Dear Catholic Friends,*

THANK YOU! As one of the billion "Muslim Friends" you kindly address, this is to express heart-felt thanks for your kind message of greetings on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr 1428H/2007CE. Our Feast is Your Feast!

Eid al-Fitr is indeed a Muslim feast, but it is also a feast of humanity in which we gratefully acknowledge and joyfully celebrate God's unbounded compassion towards all of humanity.

Through a month of fasting, prayer, recitation, remembrance, contemplation, and compassionate living with others, we respond to God's compassion by living in compassion towards His creatures. We do so in love and imitation of His ultimate Prophet and gifted-compassion Muhammad (peace be upon him), and of all previous Prophets (peace be upon them), including the Messiah Jesus son of Mary (peace be upon him).

On Eid days we live in utter joy and mutual goodwill and forgiveness. 'Id is a great time for repairing all that is ruptured, and healing all

that is ailing. Thus, your message of goodwill and peace comes at a most opportune time. May God (exalted is He) grace you with His peace and compassion.

The teaching of peace and compassion that you kindly proclaim in your message is one that pertains to the very essence of Islam, and is therefore dear to the hearts of Muslims. I cherish you and thank you for sharing it.

God is the source of all compassion and is most compassionate (*al-rahman al-rahim*). He has sent to humanity a sequence of compassionate Prophets, in loving manifestation of His own compassion.

Some of these Prophets came to humanity with heavenly books of guidance and compassion (*hudan wa rahma*). The ultimate of these heavenly books is the Qur'an, the book of light, guidance, and compassion. These Prophets (peace be upon them all) preached total love and devotion to the One True God, and love and compassion towards His creatures, our neighbors.

The First Prophetic Teaching

In our Muslim tradition, there is a revered tradition of transmitting Prophetic utterances from one teacher to another in a chain that authentically links us with the Muhammad, the Prophet of Compassion (peace be upon him).

There is also a tradition of transmitting and receiving the very first hadith one learns from one's teacher. This is called the "chain of firstness" (*al-musalsal bil auwaliya*).

The first hadith I learned from my Sheikh al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Alawi al-Maliki (mercy be upon him), with a continuous chain all the way back to the Prophet (peace be upon him) is amazingly foundational in Islam:

The compassionate shall be shown compassion by The Compassionate (blessed and exalted is He). Have compassion upon those on earth, and the One in heaven shall have compassion upon you.

Compassionate Youth

For generations the compassionate teachings of Muhammad (peace be upon him) were successfully transmitted in Muslim communities through a revered and balanced tradition that combined doctrine

(*‘aqida* covering *iman*), jurisprudence (*fiqh* covering *islam*), and spirituality (*tasawwuf* covering *ihsan*).

The institutions of transmission that traditionally safeguarded the compassionate and true teaching of Islam unfortunately suffered multiple attacks first by the forces of inner decay and stagnation, then by colonial powers and then by secularizing nationalist ideologues and rulers. The confiscation of religious foundations (*awqaf*) also led to the loss of the independent economic base for these institutions. The advent of legalistic, overly politicized, and spiritually-poor distortions of Islam have all further weakened the traditional institutions of compassion and wisdom transmission.

Today, there is an urgent need to repair, rehabilitate, and maintain the scholarly and spiritual institutions that preserve and grow compassion in the hearts of youth. This is a challenge that is faced by all traditional communities striving to preserve their wisdom in the midst of an increasingly, and viciously, cruel and materialistic world. Dialogue with other religions and philosophies is key in keeping open enough to grow and flourish healthy institutions.

Malignant Mutations of Tradition

As in the case with all religions, the wholesome and compassionate teachings of the true Islamic tradition were sometimes distorted, and warped. In some cases malignant theological mutations resulted in grotesque actions.

Just as the peace-loving teaching of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) was sometimes warped and invoked to unleash cruel actions, the peace-loving teaching of Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sometimes also warped and invoked to unleash cruel attacks on fellow human beings, such as in the grotesque terrorist attacks of recent times.

When it comes to crazed cruelty against God’s beloved creatures, no tradition is immune from distortion. We must all be on vigilant guard against abusive and distorting mutilations of our traditions.

We must all unite in condemning all cruelty against even a single soul of God’s creatures, for that is equivalent to attacking all of humanity. We must unite in compassion against all cruelty, wherever it comes from, and whoever happens to practice it.

However, each one of us is especially, theologically, and morally, responsible to condemn, and repudiate, all cruelty perpetrated in the name of his or her religious tradition.

When it comes to theological mutilations and distortions, we humans tend to be very good at detecting them in others. It is very easy for all of us to fall into self-righteous and judgmental modes. Here it is important to point out that, as a Muslim, I do take to heart, with utter respect, the following passages from Christian Scriptures, of which we should all be constantly reminded (Matthew 7):

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", when there is the log in your own eye?

One of the key gifts of dialogue is that it can help us keep each other honest. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says that "the believer is the mirror of his fellow believer". By being mirrors for each other, we keep each other focused on the true and sincere service to the One God, and help each other cure the eye-troubles that impair our spiritual sight.

Religious Freedom

As a Muslim, I readily share with you the insistence on the importance of respecting religious freedom and freedom of conscience. Such freedom is divinely ordained into the very personhood of human beings through the original divine breath, and primordial covenant. This doctrine is rooted in the Qur'an itself. Here are some key verses:

If it had been Thy Lord's will, They would all have believed—all who are on earth! Wilt Thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe! (10:99)

Let there be no compulsion In religion: truth stands out Clear from error: Whoever rejects evil and believes In God hath grasped the Most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. and God heareth and knoweth all things. (2:256)

It is true Thou wilt not be able to guide every one, whom Thou lovest;

but God guides those whom He will and He knows best those who receive guidance. (28:56)

Now, that being said, of course, Muslim communities everywhere do face the challenge of living up to the Qur'anic imperative, just as other religious communities face their own challenges. The complex issues of balancing human rights, human duties, and communal integrity and well-being are in need of urgent studies and discussions. Accumulated and normative juridical rulings, from different ages and different circumstances must be addressed, engaged, and updated. Such a task demands tremendous work and fresh juridical striving by all concerned. Dialogue is key to this important work as well.

However, these issues are faced by all religious traditions, and there is an urgent need, for all of us, to reconcile revelation-based affirmations of rights and duties with the more recent, but popular, affirmations that come from the notions and vocabularies of the French Revolution and British liberal teachings.

Indeed, we are all called upon to retrieve, rehabilitate, and rearticulate the true compassionate teachings of our traditions regarding the divinely ordained value of human personhood and its associated rights, duties, and freedoms. We need to work on these issues with not only religious colleagues, but also with philosophers and jurists who invoke "natural" grounds for personhood and rights. Islam does have notions of a primordial covenant and an original make-up (*fitra*) that can engage such discourses as those of natural law and liberalism.

Ending the Spiral of Conflict Through Forgiveness

Your insight into the importance of education for peace and compassion, and its potential role in ending the spiral of conflict in which humanity is caught today, is very much appreciated.

The most important element of such a wholesome education is the teaching of forgiveness. Most cruelty today is practiced in the name of justice based on grievances, often real, sometimes only perceived, and conveniently supported by false logics of "reciprocity", and even "justice", that often drag us down into endless spirals of vengeful tit-for-tat.

Our two traditions both clearly value forgiveness. Alas, we humans are often not very good practitioners of it. Sadly, our two communities

often fail in this important regard. Here is what the Qur'an tells a Muslim to do:

Repel evil with that which is best: we are well acquainted with the things They say. (23:96)

Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better: then will He between whom and Thee was hatred become As it were Thy friend and intimate! (41:34)

Let them forgive and overlook, do you not wish that God should forgive you? for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (24:22)

Here is what the Bible tells the Christian to do (*Matthew* 5:38-47):

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy". But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Compassion and forgiveness are key to breaking the strangle-hold of cruelty in our world today. Our mutual accusations and self-righteous demands just make things worse. The stereotyping of the other, and the non-hearing, or hearing-but-ignoring of good gestures coming from the other are all ways in which we humans often serve our own arrogant egos, but definitely not our beloved and compassionate Creator (Exalted is He).

Prayer

Let me conclude this long note of thanks for your kind 'Id Message, by invoking two Qur'anic prayers:

VATICAN ENGAGEMENTS

Moses prayed: “O My Lord! forgive me and My brother! admit us to Thy mercy! for Thou art the Most Merciful of those who Show mercy!”
(7:151)

Then will He be of those who believe, and enjoin patience (constancy, and self-restraint), and enjoin deeds of kindness and compassion.
(90:17)

May God (exalted is He) encompass all of us within His infinite compassion. *He knows best.*

PART SEVEN



THE MAGDI ALLAM CONTROVERSY



“Benedict XVI Tells Us That We Must Conquer Fear”

MAGDI CRISTIANO ALLAM

[We cover here the debate on the issue of the baptism of Magdi Allam and the author's response to the issue. Allam was baptized by Pope Benedict XVI on 22 March, 2008 at St. Peter's on Easter Vigil. Allam published his reasons for conversion, which we reproduce here, and called for the Vatican to renew evangelization to Muslims. The author criticized the Vatican for baptizing Allam and saw it as an act of provocation that could undermine inter-faith relations. This was followed by reply to the author by Fr. Federico Lombardi, the director of the Holy See Press Office, who distanced Pope Benedict from Allam's political views. Allam, on 25 March, 2013, renounced the Catholic Church for being taking a soft stance on Islam. All three contributions were published on Chiesa.com]

DEAR DIRECTOR, what I am about to tell you concerns a decision I have made regarding my religious faith and personal life that is not intended in any way to involve *Corriere della Sera*, which I have been honored to be part of since 2003 with the title of vice director “ad personam.” I therefore write to you as the author of an action as a private citizen.

Yesterday evening, at the Easter vigil, I converted to the Catholic Christian faith, renouncing my previous Islamic faith.

Thus, by divine grace, there finally came to light the sound and mature fruit of a long period of gestation lived in suffering and in joy, between deep and intimate reflection and deliberate outward expression.

I am particularly grateful to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, who imparted to me the sacraments of Christian initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—in the basilica of Saint Peter, during the solemn celebration of the Easter vigil. And I took the simplest and clearest Christian name: “Cristiano”. So, as of yesterday evening, my name is Magdi Cristiano Allam.

For me, it was the most beautiful day of my life. To receive the gift of the Christian faith during the commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ, at the hand of the Holy Father, is for a believer an unmatched privilege and an inestimable good.

At almost 56 years of age, in my own small way this is an historic event, exceptional and unforgettable, marking a radical and definitive break with the past. The miracle of the Resurrection of Christ has resounded through my soul, freeing it from the darkness of the preaching in which hatred and intolerance toward those who are “different”, uncritically condemned as the “enemy,” prevail over love and respect for one’s “neighbor,” who is always and in any case a “person”; just as my mind has been liberated from the obscurantism of an ideology that legitimizes deception and dissimulation, the violent death that induces murder and suicide, blind submission and tyranny, permitting me to adhere to the authentic religion of Truth, Life, and Freedom. In my first Easter as a Christian, I discovered not only Jesus, but I discovered for the first time the one true God, who is the God of Faith and Reason.

My conversion to Catholicism is the arrival point of a gradual and profound interior meditation which I would not have been able to avoid, since for five years I have been trapped in an entrenched and guarded lifestyle, with fixed surveillance at home and a police escort wherever I go, because of the death threats made against me by Islamic extremists and terrorists, both those living in Italy and those active abroad.

I have had to wonder to myself about the attitude of those who have publicly issued fatwas, Islamic juridical declarations denouncing me, who was a Muslim, as an “enemy of Islam,” a “hypocrite, because he is a Coptic Christian who pretends to be a Muslim in order to harm Islam”, a “liar and defamer of Islam,” legitimizing in this way my condemnation to death.

I have asked myself how it could be possible that someone who, like me, has fought with conviction and determination for a “moderate Islam,” taking on the responsibility of exposing himself personally to the denunciation of Islamic extremism and terrorism, should then end up being condemned to death in the name of Islam and with the justification of the Qur’an.

I therefore had to take note of the fact that, beyond the contingency of the flourishing of Islamic extremists and terrorism on a worldwide level, the root of the evil is situated in an Islam that is physiologically violent and historically conflictual.

Parallel to this, Providence introduced me to practicing Catholics of good will who, by virtue of their witness and their friendship, gradually became a point of reference on the level of their certainty of the truth and solidity of values. First there are my many friends of Communion and Liberation, chief among them Fr. Juliàn Carròn; ordinary religious like Fr. Gabriele Mangiarotti, Sister Maria Gloria Riva, Fr. Carlo Maurizi, and Fr. Yohannis Lahzi Gaid; the rediscovery of the Salesians thanks to Fr. Angelo Tengattini and Fr. Maurizio Verlezza, culminating in a renewed friendship with rector major Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva; to the embrace of other prelates of great humanity like cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the bishops Luigi Negri, Giancarlo Vecerrica, Gino Romanazzi, and, above all, Rino Fisichella, who personally accompanied me in my spiritual journey of accepting the Christian faith.

But undoubtedly the most extraordinary and meaningful encounter in my decision to convert was with pope Benedict XVI, whom I admired and defended as a Muslim for his mastery in presenting the indissoluble bond between faith and reason as the foundation of authentic religion and of humane civilization, and to whom I adhere completely as a Christian in order to be inspired with new light in the fulfillment of the mission that God has reserved for me.

Mine is a journey that began when I was four, and my mother Safeya, a believing and practicing Muslim—in the first of a series of “coincidences” that would reveal themselves as something entirely other than fortuitous, but rather an integral part of a divine destiny to which we are all called—entrusted me to the loving care of Sister Lavinia, of the Comboni order, convinced of the quality of the educa-

tion that would be given to me by the Italian Catholic sisters transplanted to Cairo, my birthplace, to bear witness to their Christian faith through activities meant to foster the common good.

I thus began the experience of life in the boarding school, which continued with the Salesians of the Don Bosco Institute at middle school and high school, who integrally transmitted not only intellectual knowledge, but above all the understanding of values. It is thanks to Catholic religious that I acquired a deeply and essentially ethical conception of life, in which the person created in the image and likeness of God is called to carry out a mission that is situated within the context of a universal and eternal plan, aimed at the interior resurrection of individuals on this earth, and of all humanity on the Day of Judgment, which is founded upon faith in God and in the primacy of values, and based upon the meaning of individual responsibility and the meaning of duties toward society. It is by virtue of a Christian education and a shared experience of life together with Catholic religious that I have always cultivated a profound faith in the transcendent dimension, just as I have always sought for the certainty of the truth in absolute and universal values.

There was a period in which the loving presence and religious zeal of my mother brought me closer to Islam, which I periodically practiced on a cultural level, and in which I believed on the spiritual level according to an interpretation that at that time, the 1970s, corresponded overall to a faith respectful of the person and tolerant toward one's neighbor, in a context—that of the Nasser regime—in which the secular principle of the separation of the sacred and profane spheres predominated.

My father, Mahmoud, was completely secularist, like the majority of Egyptians who took the West as their model on the level of individual freedom, social custom, and cultural and artistic fashion, even if unfortunately Nasser's political totalitarianism and warmongering ideology of pan-Arabism, which aimed for the physical elimination of Israel, led to catastrophe for Egypt and cleared the way for the resurgence of pan-Islamism, the rise to power of Islamic extremists, and the explosion of globalized Islamic terrorism.

My long years at boarding school also permitted me to understand thoroughly and from up close the reality of Catholicism and of the

women and men who have dedicated their lives to serving God in the bosom of the Church. Already at that time, I was reading the Bible and the Gospels, and I was particularly fascinated by the human and divine figure of Jesus. I was able to attend Holy Mass, and it also happened, although only once, that I approached the altar and received communion. It was an action that clearly signaled my attraction to Christianity and my desire to feel myself a part of the Catholic religious community.

Following this, upon my arrival in Italy at the beginning of the 1970s, amid the student uprisings and the difficulties with integration, I lived through the period of atheism paraded as faith, which was nevertheless also founded upon the primacy of absolute and universal values. I have never been indifferent to the presence of God, even if it is only now that I feel that the God of Love, of Faith and of Reason, has fully reconciled me with the heritage of values that is rooted within me.

Dear director, you asked me whether I am not afraid for my life, in the awareness that my conversion to Christianity will certainly obtain for me yet another condemnation to death for apostasy, and a much more serious one.

You are perfectly right. I know what I am going up against, but I will face my fate with my head held high, with my back straight and with the interior firmness of those who have the certainty of their faith. And I will be all the more so after the historic and courageous gesture of the pope who—from the very first moment when he found out about my wish—immediately agreed to personally impart to me the sacraments of Christian initiation.

His Holiness has launched a clear and revolutionary message to a Church that until now has been excessively prudent in the conversion of Muslims, abstaining from proselytizing in Muslim majority countries, and remaining silent about the reality of converts in Christian countries. Out of fear. The fear of being unable to protect converts in the face of their condemnation to death for apostasy, and the fear of retaliation against Christians living in Muslim countries.

And so, now Benedict XVI, with his testimony, is telling us that we must overcome fear and have no qualms in affirming the truth of Jesus with Muslims as well. For my part, I say that it is time to put an end

to the presumption and violence of Muslims who do not respect the freedom of religious choice.

In Italy, there are thousands of converts to Islam who live peacefully in their new faith. But there are also thousands of Muslim converts to Christianity who are forced to hide their new faith out of fear of being assassinated by Islamic extremists lurking among us. For one of these “cases” that evoke the discreet hand of the Lord, my first article written for *Corriere della Sera* on 3 September, 2003, was entitled: “The new catacombs of the Islamic converts”. It was an investigation of some of the new Christians in Italy who denounce their profound spiritual and human isolation, in the face of neglect from the institutions of the state that do not ensure their security, and of the silence of the Church itself.

And so, I hope that from the historic gesture of the pope and from my witness they may derive the conviction that the time has come to emerge from the darkness of the catacombs, and to confirm publicly their will to be fully themselves.

If we are not capable in Italy, the cradle of Catholicism, of guaranteeing complete religious freedom for all, then how will we ever be credible when we denounce the violations of this freedom in other countries of the world? I pray to God that this special Easter may bring the resurrection of the spirit to all of the faithful in Christ who still live under the yoke of fear. Happy Easter to all.

23 March, 2008



Comments on the Papal Baptism of Magdi Allan

AREF ALI NAYED

ISLAM AS A FAITH is a divine gift. As gift it is gracefully granted by God. How a person responds to that gift is a deeply intimate matter that is between that person and God.

Allam's soul is best known to, and judged by, His Maker. It is God who will judge Him on how he responded to the gift of faith. He is responsible before His Maker to the extent of his freedom and capacity. The fact that Allam was given Catholic communion at a very young age under the influence of his early Catholic teachers seems to indicate that he was Christianized in childhood. As a result of his early Catholic schooling, he is reported to have never upheld or practiced the tenets of Islam.

The case of Allam reminds us, yet again, of the legitimate concerns of many Muslim scholars regarding the abuse of the trust that sometimes happens when Muslim parents, because of economic or other factors, send their children to Catholic schools. What happens to children, including Muslim ones, in Catholic schools is a matter that must be discussed as part of addressing "Human Dignity" in upcoming discussions. The use of schools for proselytizing is one of the important issues to be discussed.

As for the Vatican's deliberate and provocative act of baptizing Allam on such a special occasion and in such a spectacular way, it is sufficient to say the following:

1) It is sad that the intimate and personal act of a religious conversion is made into a triumphalist tool for scoring points. Such instru-

mentalization of a person and his conversion is contrary to the basic tenets of upholding Human Dignity. It also comes at a most unfortunate time when sincere Muslims and Catholics are working very hard to mend ruptures between the two communities.

2) It is sad that the particular person chosen for such a highly public gesture has a history of generating, and continuing to generate, hateful discourse. The basic message of Allam's most recent article is the very message of the Byzantine Emperor quoted by the Pope in his infamous Regensburg Lecture. It is not far fetched to see this as another way of re-asserting the message of Regensburg (which the Vatican keeps insisting was not intended). It is now important for the Vatican to distance itself from Allam's discourse. Should Muslims take the high-profile Papal baptism as a Papal endorsement of Allam's discourses regarding the nature of Islam (which happen to coincide with the message of Regensburg)?

3) It is sad that Benedict XVI chose to make the basic message of his religious discourse during the special occasion of Easter into a quasi-Manichean one with motifs of "darkness" and "light", "darkness" being assigned to the "other" and "light" to the "self". It is also sad that the idea of "peace" expressed in that discourse reduces to the bringing of the "other" into the fold through baptism. Such Roman totalitarian discourse is most unhelpful.

The whole spectacle with its choreography, persona, and messages provokes genuine questions about the motives, intentions, and plans of some of the Pope's advisors on Islam. Nevertheless, we will not let this unfortunate episode distract us from our work on pursuing "A Common Word" for the sake of humanity and world peace. Our basis for dialogue is not a tit-for-tat logic of 'reciprocity', it is rather a compassionate theology of "mending the in-between" for the sake of Love of God and Love of neighbor.

24 March, 2008



“Our Ailing World Did Not Need Another Provocation”

INTERVIEW BY AREF ALI NAYED IN
THE SPANISH NEWSPAPER EL-PAÍS
BY IGNACIO CEMBRERO

AREF ALI NAYED HOLDS an official post, that of director of the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies of Islam in Amman, but in recent months he has been the spokesman for some 200 Muslim scholars who have initiated a dialogue with the Christian community, having signed the manifesto “A Common Word”, in which they seek to highlight common values.

At the start of this year he was in the Vatican and he plans to return there in the next six months to meet with Pope Benedict XVI. Nonetheless, he still rails against the Pope for having “provoked” Muslims by baptizing at Easter the Egyptian journalist Magdi Allam, a well-known critic of Islam.

QUESTION. Do you think the Pope should not have baptized the Egyptian journalist Magdi Allam last week? Is that, in your opinion, a kind of provocation?

ANSWER. There is no problem in Allam being baptized; he seems to have been a tacit Catholic all his life as a result of his Catholic schooling, and it is his decision before God. There is no problem in the Pope baptizing because that is part of what Pope’s do. There is, however, a problem with the Pope personally and spectacularly baptizing an infamous anti-Islam journalist who, on the very same day, revives the anti-Islam discourse of Regensburg.

QUESTION. Do you think the Pope was badly advised?

ANSWER. Yes, indeed. Many moderate and sincere Muslims and Catholics have worked very hard to mend the massive damage caused

by the Pope's Regensburg Lecture (September 2006). Just recently we have been able to achieve, together, the establishment of a permanent Catholic-Muslim Forum. Our ailing world, suffering from an abundance of conflicts, did not need another provocation.

QUESTION. *How is the Muslim world reacting to that?*

ANSWER. There are scholars who feel that the whole case should just be ignored. There has been an annoying recent tendency to try to repeatedly provoke Muslims. When we give these provocations attention we are satisfying the provocateurs. There are others who blame us for pursuing Catholic-Muslim dialogue because they think that the present Vatican attitude is not conducive to dialogue. There are others, and I am amongst them, who feel that we must continue dialogue no matter how provoked we are. Dialogue is a religious duty that must be pursued for the sake of all humanity and of world peace.

QUESTION. *Are there some resemblances between the Easter baptism and the allocution of Regensburg?*

ANSWER. Yes, the triumphalist chorography, and the contents of Allam's baptism article in the *Corriere della Sera* are identical to the content and spirit of the Regensburg Lecture. That is the main problem with the whole episode.

QUESTION. *From time to time we also see leading Christian intellectuals converting to Islam. Could Christians also become angry?*

ANSWER. I think that if a Muslim authority picked out a converting vehemently anti-Christian author and exhibited him on television in a major ceremony, and published a hateful anti-Christian article by him, many Christians would indeed be angry. People are converting both ways all the time. The issue was not the conversion, but rather the way it was instrumentalized by the Vatican.

QUESTION. *Do you think the conversion of Magdi Allam is special because he is a fierce critic of radical Islam and a defender of Israel? Was Allam influenced by Catholic schools he attended as a child?*

ANSWER. No, it was special because of his hateful anti-Islam discourses. The problem is not his anti-radicalism; Most of our scholars are also anti-radicalim. The problem is that he is vehemently and hatefully anti-Islam. Allam says that he took communion as a child. He seems to have been Christianized at school at an early age.

QUESTION. *Mustapha Krim, the president of the Protestant Church*

of Algeria, reported yesterday that 13 temples have been close mainly in Kabylia by the Algerian authorities. The apostolic nuncio in the Gulf, Archbishop Mouned El-Hachem, has not reached until now an agreement with Saudi Arabia in order to be allowed to open churches in this country. Could the Christians aspire to reciprocity?

ANSWER. Reciprocity is an important diplomatic notion. However, the ethics and conduct of followers of heavenly religions should be based on the unhesitating praxis of pure compassion, without regard to how others treat them. Only Algerian can address the Algerian cases. They best know their country, its circumstances, and its history. I am sure that the dark and bloody pages of the alliance between Colonialism and Catholicism in Algeria have a lot to do with Algerian attitudes. As for Saudi Arabia, the Vatican is now engaged with the Royal House itself, and such issues can be discussed between them. It is often forgotten, however, that the Vatican never granted mosques when it was in power, and is unlikely to grant a mosque in the Vatican City. As a matter of fact, it always resisted mosque building until the Italian secular state granted such rights in very recent times. When invoking “reciprocity”, one must not self-righteously claim the good deeds granted by others as deeds of one’s own.

QUESTION. *Last week Osama Bin Laden attacking King Abdallah because he travelled to the Vatican last year to meet the Pope. Are radical Muslims obstructing religious freedom in the Arab world? Are they preventing Governments from making concessions to Christian religions?*

ANSWER. I do not think that radicals determine what Muslim governments do. However, the multiple attacks on Muslim countries and peoples are often cited in critiques of any positive moves towards the West by any Muslim government. I am sure that the ending of wars and the bringing about of peace can help improve Muslim-Christian relations on all fronts.

QUESTION. *Do you consider the cartoons of the Prophet an expression of (large) widespread and popular anti-Islamic feeling in Europe and in the West?*

ANSWER. I would not say “a large popular feeling”, but a loud minority element in the complex composition of the West. Europe has always had a minority of demonic and dark forces. Such forces focused

their hate on our Jewish brothers and sisters in the past, with horrific and tragic results. These forces are now focusing their hateful vehemence on Islam and Muslims. I pray that Europe will have the wisdom to see such forces for what they are. Such forces can change the object of their hate, but are still essentially the same forces that lead to the darkest chapter in Europe's history. We must not let these forces hide behind appeals to freedom of expression, a freedom that we all uphold.

QUESTION. *Are you nevertheless continuing the dialogue with Christians? Are you going to hold a formal meeting in November in Rome? Would it be now more difficult now?*

ANSWER. Our dialogue with the People of the Book (Christian and Jewish) is a theological and spiritual imperative. The Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) asks us to connect even with those who cut us off, to give to even those who deprive us, and to forgive even those who are unjust towards us. We will continue dialogue no matter what. Furthermore, our dialogue is not limited to Catholics. We are in very productive dialogue with Evangelicals, Anglicans, Orthodox, and a host of other denominations. As for the November meeting, I do pray that it will still go forward. We need to be engaged in order to resolve crises. It would help, however, if we all refrain from creating further ones.

26 March, 2008



“May We Be Permitted to Express in Turn Our Own Displeasure”

FEDERICO LOMBARDI S.I.

FIRST OF ALL, the most important statement is undoubtedly the confirmation of professor Aref Ali Nayed’s desire to continue the dialogue of deeper reciprocal understanding between Muslims and Christians, and absolutely not to bring into question the journey begun with the [written] correspondence and the contacts established in the last year and a half between the Muslim scholars who signed the well-known letter and the Vatican, in particular the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. This journey must continue, it is of extreme importance, it must not be broken off, and it takes priority in comparison with episodes that can be the subject of misunderstandings.

Secondly, administering baptism to a person implies recognizing that he has welcomed the Christian faith freely and sincerely, in its fundamental articles expressed in the “profession of faith”. This is publicly proclaimed at baptism. Naturally, every believer is free to retain his own ideas on a very wide spectrum of questions and problems in which there is legitimate pluralism among Christians. Welcoming a new believer into the Church clearly does not mean espousing all of his ideas and positions, in particular on political or social topics.

The baptism of Magdi Cristiano Allam is a good opportunity to reiterate this fundamental principle explicitly. He has the right to express his own ideas, which remain personal ideas, clearly without becoming in any way the official expression of the positions of the Pope or of the Holy See.

As for the debate over the Pope’s lecture in Regensburg, the expla-

nations of its correct interpretation according to the intentions of the pope were given at the time, and there is no reason to bring them into question again. At the same time, some of the topics addressed at the time, such as the relationship between faith and reason, between religion and violence, naturally remain the object of reflection and debate, and of varying positions, since they refer to problems that cannot be resolved once and for all.

In the third place, the liturgy of the Easter vigil was celebrated as it is every year, and the symbolism of light and darkness is always part of it. It is certainly a solemn liturgy, and its celebration by the pope in St. Peter's is a very special occasion. But to accuse as "Manichean" the explanation of the liturgical symbols on the part of the pope—which he provides each time, and in which he is a master—perhaps manifests a lack of understanding of the Catholic liturgy rather than a criticism pertinent to the discourse of Benedict XVI.

Finally, may we be permitted to express in turn our own displeasure over what professor Nayed says about education in Christian schools in Muslim majority countries, objecting to the risk of proselytism. It seems to us that the extraordinarily great tradition of educational efforts on the part of the Catholic Church, including in countries with non-Christian majorities (not only in Egypt, but also in India, Japan, etc.), where for a very long time the great majority of the students in the Catholic schools and universities have not been Christian and have peacefully remained so, although with true esteem for the education they have received there, deserves a rather different appraisal. We do not think that the Church today deserves the accusation of lacking respect for the dignity and freedom of the human person. The violations of this calling for urgent attention are quite different. And it was perhaps for this reason as well that the pope took the risk of this baptism: to affirm the freedom of religious choice stemming from the dignity of the human person.

In any case, professor Aref Ali Nayed is a counterpart for whom we maintain the highest esteem, and with whom transparent communication is always worthwhile. This allows us to trust in the continuation of dialogue.

Vatican Radio, 27 March, 2008

PART EIGHT



A COMMON WORD INITIATIVE



The Promise of “A Common Word”

IN AN ERA OF HATEFUL, VENGEFUL, and destructive discourses, every human community, religious or otherwise, is called upon, for the sake of God, and for the sake of our common humanity, to develop, articulate, and clearly proclaim alternative discourses that are loving, forgiving, and constructive.

Discourses directly affect actions, and, are as a matter of fact, already an important category of actions. Discourses that are hateful, vengeful, and destructive, can only lead to actions of grotesque cruelty and mayhem. Discourses that are loving, forgiving, and constructive, can only lead to actions marked by compassionate gentleness and harmony.

The deeper the creedal roots of a discourse, the more potency and efficacy it has in the arena of action. Hateful and destructive creedal discourse is catastrophically destructive to humanity. Loving and constructive creedal discourse is wholesome and nourishing.

Again, the more authoritative the source of the discourse is, the more potency and efficacy it has at the level of action. Discourses coming from a community's leadership are of utter importance, and effectiveness. They have an immediate effect on teaching, preaching, and individual and communal conduct.

The Muslim community, like any other human community, is called upon, for the sake of God and His beloved creatures, to articulate a wholesome creedal discourse that is truly in line with its God-assigned duty on earth, and that leads to proper loving conduct toward God's beloved creatures.

Such wholesome Muslim creedal discourse must not be that of a few scattered individuals. It must be a communal discourse built upon

communal consensus, and rooted in the revelatory sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet of God, Muhammad (peace be upon him), and in the communally inherited and transmitted example of his blessed companions, and righteous kinship and followers. Furthermore, it must clearly and unanimously come from the very leadership of the Muslim community.

The criteria of wholesome creedal discourse have been endowed to us by God Himself in the glorious Qur'an:

See you not how God sets forth a parable? A goodly word like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens. And God sets forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember. (14: 24-25)

Thus all proper and wholesome creedal discourse must be:

1. Rooted.
2. Open-ended.
3. Ever fresh and fruitful.

Muslim creedal discourse today must strive to abide by these divine criteria. It must be firmly rooted in: the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the *Ijma'* of the Umma. It must be open-ended through the dialectical and respectful dialogue with other religions and philosophies. It must be constantly refreshed and focused on bearing fruits that can serve the community and humanity at large.

In an unprecedented, and immensely important, communal consensus (constituting a spiritual, moral, and juridical normative *ijma'* or accord), one hundred and thirty eight prominent Muslim leaders gathered together and planted a wholesome seed for such a wholesome tree: a healing creedal discourse of Love of the One God, and Love of the Neighbor.

The one hundred and thirty leaders, collectively guiding and influencing millions of Muslims all over the globe, include religious authorities, scholars, teachers, intellectuals, and media leaders, from Sunni, Shi'i (Ja'fari, Zaidi, and Isma'ili), and Ibadi schools.

They jointly launched the document as an "Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders" addressed to the heads of all prominent Christian Churches, and to the "leaders of Christian Churches,

everywhere". They titled the document, following a Qur'anic phrasing, "A Common Word Between Us and You".

The hope-giving promise of this "Common Word" is worthy of deep reflection, and is of immense importance for at least the following ten reasons:

1. It is addressed by leaders who collectively guide and influence millions of Muslims to leaders who guide and influence millions of Christians.

2. It is deeply rooted in the Scriptures of both Islam and Christianity, and, as such, already uses a dialogical scriptural reasoning from the very start. This is a solid foundation of all sorts of dialogical engagements in future stages.

3. It goes back to the very foundations, and with utter and humble simplicity reinvigorates, rehabilitates, and re-proclaims the simple but immensely powerful theology of love of the One God, and love of the neighbor.

4. It appeals to foundational revelatory and scriptural consensus upon which sensible human beings can agree, and that can serve as a solid basis for further elaborations and constructs.

5. It retrieves the gentle invitational mode of discourse that is founded in the true recognition of the other, and that truly revives the proper Muslim discourse of "wisdom and fair exhortation" that is mandated by God in the Qur'an.

6. It speaks prophetically and invokes the collective prophetic and revelatory inheritance of all of humanity. Thus, it restores and heals prophetic kinship between the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities.

7. By invoking both the Torah and the New Testament, it addresses Christians, but already prepares the ground for a much-needed further discourse towards healing relations with the Jews.

8. The document retrieves the very roots of a proper Muslim theology of gratitude. By invoking the saving efficacy of Divine compassionate grace (*rahma*), and seeing all of religiosity as an attitude of thanksgiving and appreciation of Divine generosity, the document lays a solid foundation for grace-filled theology, teaching, and preaching that will result in grace-based actions in our troubled world.

9. "A Common Word" definitively and authoritatively retrieves and

rearticulates a solid Muslim theology that responds to divine graceful generosity with sincere devotion and exclusive worship of the One God; but a theology that also sees that such a response to God must concretely manifest itself in the love of our neighbors and all of God's creatures.

10. Finally, the document invokes key realities and notions that will be the seed for much further theological and spiritual elaboration in future documents: the heart, wisdom, paradigmatic example-following, divine remembrance, and divinely-endowed human dignity and freedom.

Finally, I whole-heartedly believe that the true promise of this vital document, "A Common Word", is that it is a first, but monumental step, toward retrieving and reliving the true Muslim way that was vividly described, long ago, by a spiritual master called Sidi Ahmed al-Rifa'i:

Master Ibrahim al-Azab (may God be pleased with him) said: "I said to Master Ahmed (al-Rifa'i): "My Master, the seekers discussed the way to God, and had many opinions". He replied: "My son, the ways to God are as many as the breaths of creatures! Oh Ibrahim, your grandfather (referring to himself) left no way without exploring (except those ways that God did not will for him). Oh Ibrahim, I explored all ways, and found no way closer, more-giving, more-hopeful, and more-lovely than the way of meekness (*ajz*), brokenness (*inkisar*), bewilderment (*hayra*), and poverty (*iftiqar*) (before God)".¹

The document reopens precisely this way to God, the way of utter devotion to the One God, and utter love for His creatures. Such a simple, but profound way consists of:

1. Continuously remembering God and His compassion toward us.
2. Living in gratitude for God's compassion, through total devotion to Him.
3. Living as intensely as possible in mutual compassion (*tarahum*) with our neighbors.

The sooner we Muslims rehabilitate and mend our classical networks and institutions, and reconnect them with the rest of humanity

PROMISE OF A COMMON WORD

in sincere and humble dialogue, the more able we will be to serve God and humanity. This “Common Word” is a great first step along the way.

NOTES

¹ Muhammad Abul-Huda al-Siadi, *Qiladat al-Jawahir* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Rifa'i, 2004).



Frequently Asked Questions About the “Common Word” Initiative

QUESTION. *What is this document really about?*

ANSWER. Simply, it is about a witnessing and proclaiming of Love of God, Love of Neighbor, and an invitation to join hands with Christians on such a basis, for the sake of God and world-peace.

QUESTION. *Why now?*

ANSWER. The world is living in turmoil that threatens to get even worse. We need peace.

QUESTION. *Isn't it too late?*

ANSWER. Better late than never. The various signatories, and other Muslims, have been vocal before, but individually or in small groups. What is new is the successful gathering together to speak with one voice, a voice of mainstream Islam.

QUESTION. *Is the group of signatures representative?*

ANSWER. Yes, it is. It includes people with different profiles: religious authorities, scholars, intellectuals, media experts, professionals, etc... It also includes people from different schools of mainstream Islam: Sunni, Shi'i (Ja'fari, Zaidi, Isma'ili), and Ibadi.

QUESTION. *How representative can a mere 138 persons be?*

ANSWER. Many of the individual signatories guide or influence millions of Muslims and hold positions of religious, social, and political responsibility. The accumulated influence of the signatories is too significant to ignore.

QUESTION. *The composition of the group of 138 seems to be really mixed from the prominent to the junior?*

ANSWER. This is deliberate. It ensures a mixture of ages, experiences,

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

and backgrounds. No one profile can single-handedly engage the issues we face today. Jointly, the team is quite effective.

QUESTION. *Who is the author of this document?*

ANSWER. The author is the joint dedication of all its signatories. It is a collective effort.

QUESTION. *What were the mechanics of its production?*

ANSWER. Momentum for it started with the Amman Message and the Amman Interfaith Message. The momentum continued to grow through several gatherings and conferences, the last of which was one on "Love in the Qur'an". The final draft emerged out of that conference, and the process of signing began. The experience of having worked out a document in union to respond to the Pope last year made this year's document easier to achieve.

QUESTION. *So, is this document really a consensus?*

ANSWER. Yes, it is. It constitutes a normative *ijma'* by the Umma's scholars. This consensus will get stronger and stronger as more people sign it and uphold it. The mechanism for doing so, through the common word website, is already in place.

QUESTION. *Is this a Jordanian government document?*

ANSWER. No, it is not. It is a joint document by the Ummah's scholars. Jordan is indeed a welcoming and respected nexus of peace and harmony, which makes it an ideal place for consensus-building. The leadership of Jordan has indeed been supportive.

QUESTION. *Is this a document of the Royal Academy of the Aal al-Bayt Institute*

ANSWER. Yes, but only in so far as that Academy includes 100 scholars who offered a core base of signatories and supporters that could be expanded, and helped in the networking needed for achieving the document.

QUESTION. *How will the gains made in consensus-building and peace-making be safeguarded against erosion and dispersal?*

ANSWER. Plans are already underway for the institution-building for supporting the networking that made this achievement possible through a dedicated think-tank called the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center (RISSC).

QUESTION. *Why is it that Jews are not addressed?*

ANSWER. Jewish scriptures are invoked repeatedly and respectfully in

the document by way of preparing the ground for a further document specifically addressed to Jewish scholars. It is quite normal for documents to be bilateral without implying the exclusion of others.

QUESTION. *Why is it not addressed to people of other religions, for example Hindus and Buddhists?*

ANSWER. Again, we selected the approach of bilateral documents. More documents are to come.

QUESTION. *Are you deliberately excluding secularists and non-believers?*

ANSWER. We are concerned about all of humanity, and now that we have a mechanism for networking and working together, we will perfect it, and use it to address all of humanity in a systematic manner.

QUESTION. *Is this document an attack on the Pope so as to pressure him, in that he never answered your first document last year?*

ANSWER. We have no such intention. Even though the Pope did not answer last year's document, we still addressed him first. This is in obedience to the direction of our own religion. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) teaches us to still connect with those who cut us off.

QUESTION. *What if the Pope ignores the letter? Will you address him again?*

ANSWER. Yes, of course, we are extending our hand in love, and we will keep extending it a thousand times in obedience to God and for the sake of humanity. We are not hung up on reciprocity or tit-for-tat. We do this in answer to the religious and moral imperative we feel in our hearts.

QUESTION. *What if no one pays attention to this? What if it is simply ignored?*

ANSWER. We will have to keep trying to get through. That is a religious duty for the sake of God and humanity, no matter what the response is like.

QUESTION. *What if the response is negative?*

ANSWER. We will then respond with more gentleness, compassion, and love. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) teaches to ward off bad with good.

QUESTION. *Don't you think that you should fix your problems first and stop your inner fighting before you address others?*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ANSWER. We have already started the process of inner-healing with the Amman message. The two tasks are not mutually exclusive. As a matter of fact, sometimes addressing others unites our hearts in ways that can be healing to our own inner wounds. Only God's compassion can unite us. The more compassion we show the others, the more inner compassion we will have.

QUESTION. *Why do you think a document between religions is so important? Religions have always fought each other, but the world has still spun on its axis.*

ANSWER. Religion is too important a factor in human history and life to ignore. It has tremendous energies that can have positive or negative consequences. It is very important to unite positive religious energies for the good of humanity.

QUESTION. *Your stark warning about the future of the world is so exaggerated. Don't you think that you have over done it?*

ANSWER. No, not if you consider that we jointly constitute half of humanity and consider the amount of weaponry combined with huge misunderstandings and mutual-stereotypes.

QUESTION. *Is your reference to the danger to world peace a veiled threat?*

ANSWER. No, it is a compassionate plea for peace. Anyone who claims that it is a threat is either being paranoid or cynical or both!

QUESTION. *What use is this if terrorists are not going to heed your words?*

ANSWER. This will influence young people, and will create an atmosphere in which hatred is less likely to thrive. There is no quick fix to problems, and a patient wholesome discourse is very much needed as a foundation for a better future.

QUESTION. *Why is it that the document doesn't address real issues such as violence, religious freedom, women's issues, democracy, etc?*

ANSWER. This document is a humble first step, but one that strives to lay a solid foundation for the construction of many worthy edifices. The document can not be expected to do everything at once.

QUESTION. *Isn't this document just another form of propaganda?*

ANSWER. If you mean by that witnessing and proclaiming one's faith with compassion and gentleness, then yes. If you mean forcing one's views on others, then no.

QUESTION. *Are you willing to address a similar message to Muslim? They surely need it. Look at Iraq!*

ANSWER. Yes, this message is addressed to all of humanity. Love of God and Love of neighbor is something that we all need to practice. The Amman Message was already an internal message.

QUESTION. *How will you follow up on this?*

ANSWER. Through institution-building that can stabilize the networking and processes that lead to it, developing outreach programmes to achieve communal effectiveness, working on related research programs, and meeting with others for genuine and deep heart-to-heart discussions. Media, publishing, and web tools must be used to widen the efficacy and increase the momentum for goodness and for peace.



Rome Press Conference

[On 3 March, 2008, Muslim representatives of the “A Common Word Initiative” met with Vatican officials in Rome for two days to agree on a way forward to establish a meaningful engagement between Muslim and Catholic scholars. The Muslim participants at the meeting were Dr. Aref Ali Nayed, Dr. Ibrahim Kalin, Timothy Winter, Sheikh Yahya Pallavicini, and Sohail Nakhooda. The Vatican participants were Cardinal Tauran, Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, Msgr. Khaled Akasheh, Father Miguel Ayuso Guixot, and Father Christian W. Troll. The Muslim delegation held a press conference in the evening led by Dr. Aref Nayed. Below is the transcript of his comments at the press conference.]

AREF NAYED: We are really happy to have you here, and it gives us great courage and hope that the media is so interested in this process of the Common Word Initiative. I just want to clarify what we’re trying to achieve in this particular gathering.

We will be briefing you about what has transpired over the last two days in terms of preparatory discussions with the Vatican, but we would also like to take this opportunity to brief you about the overall Common World initiative: where we are at and what other tracks we are following, so that we can address the initiative globally and then we can speak about the particular meetings we had over the past two days.

There has been a joint communiqué that was jointly released by the Vatican and by our group, and we’ve made this press release available to you. It outlines the structure of the forthcoming events and the participants and so on.

If I may just preface all our discussions and questions and answers with a summary of the Common Word Initiative and where we're at exactly; some of you are very familiar with it and some are new to it.

We have an unprecedented gathering—kind of a network—of Muslim scholars from mainstream schools, including Sunni, Shi'i and Ibadi scholars, and these scholars gathered together in a unique manner in order, in a sense, to give back to the mainstream its voice and to re-articulate once again what mainstream Islam is about. And this group of scholars thought that a great way of starting this was to go back to the very basics of what faith is about. And we launched a document which is called “A Common Word Between Us and You” which is taken from a Qur'anic verse, and there is a website *acommonword.com* which contains a complete briefing about this document and its history as well as the massive response it is getting.

What we are trying to achieve with this initiative is to go back to the very basic simple foundations of the faith which unfortunately often gets buried in intricate theological discourses or social-political discourses; so we want to go back to the basics of love of God, love of neighbor, a sentiment that is shared with our brethren and sisters, be they Jews or Christians, who share this love of God and love of neighbor so that we can build upon that which is shared.

Since the launch of the document—which was announced simultaneously in Abu Dhabi by the Tabah Foundation led by a great scholar from Yemen, Habib Ali al-Jifri, and also in London with myself and the Bishop of London and David Ford of Cambridge, as well as in Georgetown University with the help of Professor Esposito and Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr—the response has been incredibly positive and quite heartening in many ways. We received on the very same day a positive response from the Archbishop of Canterbury; furthermore, we have had considerable responses from Protestant churches including 300 evangelical leaders who published a full page of their support, and who were not normally in dialogue with Muslims.

We were so happy that muslim scholars held a press conference in Abu Dhabi in order to thank the Christian leaders for their response. There has also been a very warm and positive response from Orthodox churches including the orthodox church of Russia and also Orthodox churches in the Middle East.

The scholars gathered in this initiative are working with their Christian counterparts on their many tracks. A conference is planned at Yale University along with Harvard Divinity School and the Princeton Theological Seminary; there is also a conference planned at Cambridge in 2008 where we expect the Archbishop of Canterbury to participate and which we look forward to because of its special focus on scripture and issues related to interpretation and hermeneutics. We will also have an event in January in 2009 with Georgetown University to address geopolitical issues and issues centering around faith and world politics. This is in addition to a track with Orthodox churches which is being held locally as well as an international event in Jordan.

The track of engaging the Catholic Church is very important. The Pope leads a billion Christians; however, our engagement is with various tracks and they are all equally important to us because different Muslim communities have different relations and live in different contexts; and it is important to keep working with all of these tracks.

For the track with the Catholic Church we were very pleased to receive some early responses from individual Catholic scholars such as Professor Dan Madigan and Professor Thomas Michel and also from the leaders and professors of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) who wrote a beautiful statement which was very encouraging to many Muslim scholars.

Subsequently, the Pope wrote through the good offices of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone and in that letter it was suggested that a group of Muslims come and organize the technical and logistical set-up for meetings, and that is what brings us to Rome.

We met with the Vatican over two days, and we concluded with some important results. First of all, the atmosphere was quite positive and welcoming and it was very nice to be with our counterparts from the Catholic Church; furthermore, by the end of the meetings, we emerged with a permanent structure that will ensure that the Catholic-Muslim engagement and dialogue will continue into the future to work out issues and exchange opinions about important matters. So we together established the Catholic-Muslim Forum which will meet every two years: one year in Rome and the subsequent meeting in Amman or Abu Dhabi, etc. This structure ensures that this is not just a momentary event, but a process that begins with love of God and love of

neighbor and continues to build upon this main theme that we gather around to address real issues that concern humanity today. So we are very pleased with the establishment of this Catholic-Muslim Forum; and we are also pleased that we have been able to jointly decide the theme which will be love of God and love of neighbor and we take that as a clear endorsement of the Common Word Initiative and we thank the Vatican for that.

Furthermore, we have decided on the first sub-theme which will be on theological-spiritual foundations for this initiative, which is very important so that we are not just engaged in socio-political discourse but in *deed* discourse. And the second day theme will be on the dignity of human beings and mutual respect and educating youth about respect between us.

We will conclude with an open session on the third day and we expect it to include a meeting between his holiness the pope and our eminent excellencies, the scholars of Islam, so that there can be a clear symbol of hope and of agreement and we can go forward in a positive manner. We are grateful to our host the Vatican for the hospitality they have shown.

QUESTION: *What do you say to those who say that theological dialogue not possible?*

AREF NAYED: I think there was some of a misunderstanding which was clarified. Some people interpreted theological dialogue as escaping from social-political issues; but what we mean by this is that addressing social and political issues should be rooted in the revelation of God and in the theological teachings of our two communities; that we cannot only do socio-political discussion devoid of theology, but that our socio-political doctrine and preaching is based on our revelation and our tradition and our theology. And we gave that clarification and it was well taken, and as a result the first day of the seminar in November will be on the theological-spiritual foundations and the second day will branch out into socio-political issues such as human dignity and human respect. Of course we have chosen the most foundational, and in many ways, neutral topics to begin with; but the forum will go on for years, and I'm sure we will address more difficult issues as we go along.

QUESTION: *The wounds of Regensburg are still open and given the pace of the world today, is meeting once every two years enough?*

AREF NAYED: This whole initiative is about healing. It is about healing the wounds of a very pained and, in many ways, destroyed world. We have cruelty all over the place; we have wars, famines, massacres, terrorist acts, torture, we have people who are kidnapped—and I take this opportunity to express our heartfelt prayers for the release of the Archbishop of the Chaldean who was kidnapped recently in Iraq—and for all prisoners of wars and prisoners of politics and prisoners of nonsense and prisoners of cruelty. There are tens of thousands of prisoners in Iraq and in Palestine and in many other places, and we pray for the release of all prisoners. We also take this time to remind our fellow Muslims that it is against the Prophet's teaching to even touch religious leaders and monks and priests because these people do not only just represent themselves as human beings who are dignified and worthy of the highest respect and sanctity, but also the fact that these people represent millions and even billions of people. Religious persons and religious leaders and religious symbols must be respected; and we are very happy that Al-Azhar and the Vatican released a very important statement condemning the insulting of religious symbols. And we pray for the release of the Archbishop and for all political prisoners and pray to God to give this world peace; and we hope this initiative is part of that much-needed healing.

You asked me if the Muslims have healed from the German lecture. Some of them still feel deeply offended. Just because we are part of this initiative doesn't mean that we are not hurt by this. However, we must not only dwell on the negative but dwell on the positive. There have been some recent positive moves by the Vatican which are much appreciated: this joint statement regarding religious symbols is very important for us, because the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Holy Qur'an are extremely important to us; and it's very encouraging to see the Vatican standing by us at a moment when some people think it is part of free speech to humiliate the sacred—so such moves by the Vatican are very important for us.

Also, recent moves by the Vatican in terms of the visit to Istanbul which was conducted with the highest and utmost mutual respect by both communities; all of these events help, some clarification state-

ments help. We would like to dwell on the positive because we need hope and we need to build trust instead of mistrust. We have systematically replied to the claims made in the German lecture both at the individual level by various scholars and also collectively in a paper signed by 38 muslim scholars. And we take those replies to stand because there has not been any substantial reply to such comments—and we feel that scholarly discussion should be met with scholarly response rather than violence or agitation or anything like that.

We are in a healing process. We were treated with dignity and respect these two days in Rome and our delegation was treated with the utmost courtesy and we appreciate that and we want to build upon it.

QUESTION: Religious freedom for christian minorities, what is your message to leaders in these countries?

AREF NAYED: It's very tempting to make inter-religious encounters into what i call a "grievances list" exchange. I mean, we Muslims have many, many grievances about the situations of Muslim minorities in predominantly Catholic countries, for example, and I am sure the Catholics have grievances in some countries. But the point is that if I bring my grievance list and they bring their grievance list we're not going to get anywhere.

I think what we need to do is to call for sanctity of life, dignity of the human being, freedom of the human being—and not discriminate, be they Jew or Catholic or Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim; the human being should be respected as such. And believe me, in many cases of oppression, you will find that everyone is oppressed in that particular country. I'm not mentioning any country by name, but in some countries you will find that oppression is general and it is very natural for minorities to feel that they are being picked on, and this happens across communities throughout the world. We know that the Pope is concerned about religious freedom and about the dignity of the human being, but we also know that they don't mean to make it specific to the Catholics; rather it is something which is completely shared. We also uphold the religious freedom and the dignity of the human being. So long as we don't self-righteously accuse each other, I think that we can make great progress by seeing each other as allies in facing oppression and cruelty and the limitations on such freedoms.

QUESTION: *What do you hope would be achieved? Since you say you represent mainstream or moderate Islam, how will that affect less mainstream Islam?*

AREF NAYED: Regarding the first part of the question: when you are in a very dark cave a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel or from above is extremely important in keeping your spirits up and for getting you out of the darkness. Humanity today suffers tremendously from cruelty, it suffers from violence, from disrespect, from torment. We need signs of hope. So when you ask, what are we trying to achieve by meeting with the Pope—and not just the Pope, but other religious symbols like Patriarch Alexy II of Russia or the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Evangelical leaders of the United States—we want the sight of these leaders with our leaders and scholars standing together in love of God and love of neighbour, so that we have signs of hope to demonstrate that religious communities can be a help in getting humanity out of the cruelty cycle that it is in rather than being a cause for the cycle.

With regard to the second part: how do we bring this mainstream message to the extremists? There is a most unfortunate phenomenon—and with all due respect to the media—the media tends to focus on the spectacular, and when that spectacular is negative or destructive, they give it more attention. And the net result is that we have this misrepresentation, so that loud, violent, cruel minorities are taken to represent entire communities. The mainstream that I'm talking about represents no less than 95% to 97% of humans who call themselves Muslim. If we can achieve peace amongst that community and the counterpart, that itself will give great help and help us deal with the issues of extremism and violent minorities.

Part of the amazing sort of negative dialectic, is that by focusing on the negative all the time we make the negative grow. and we need to refocus on the positive and the good so that the good can grow amongst us.

QUESTION: *Will the pope actually participate in the proceedings?*

AREF NAYED: The protocol of the visit will be detailed in the weeks to come. We have expressed clearly to the Vatican that the scholars expect parity and symmetry in the meetings. Of course we recognize that the Vatican has a long tradition of protocol and processes. So it will

take some weeks to finalize all the protocol details, but the idea that we have is that we must demonstrate to the world parity and symmetry and equality before God, so that we can build together rather than have one party shown to dominate. That will take some time. The participation of his holiness the Pope depends entirely on what he and the Vatican decide. Of course Muslim scholars love the contributions of scholars—and the Pope is a scholar—but we do recognize that he is also a sovereign of the Vatican and he has other functions, so it is entirely up to the Catholics to decide the extent of the involvement of the Pope. What we ask is for parity and symmetry so whatever involvement he has, the most senior of the Muslim scholar also has.

QUESTION: *Will you prepare a meeting with the Jewish communities?*

AREF NAYED: We have said from the outset that our addressing of the Christian leaders is in no way meant to exclude our Jewish brothers and sisters. As a matter of fact, in the selection of the texts we have made sure that texts that are acceptable and normative to our Jewish brothers and sisters are included in the text; but it is very natural for religious communities to deal with each other in a bilateral manner, just as the Vatican deals with the Jewish community in a separate track from the Muslim community. This particular document was addressed to the Christians. We have already started preparing a document that is addressed to Jewish rabbis and leaders, and it is a work in progress, and we are diligently working on that.

We feel that the political situation in the Middle East has for too long been allowed to dominate the religious relationship between Muslims and Jews and we do hope that building a consensus among Muslim and Jewish leaders will actually contribute to peace.

QUESTION: *Professor Troll wrote about the relationship within the Muslim community after the publication of the Common Word, what is the situation within the Muslim community?*

AREF NAYED: There is a very ancient theological focal point which is called *tawhid al-qibla*, “the unity of direction of Mecca”, which was throughout the ages seen as essential for the various Muslim communities. So although the Sunnis and the Shi‘a and the Ibadis differ in some doctrinal notions; there is a unity of intentionality and direction.

All this initiative is doing is simply re-activating and re-articulating this. And this process started in Amman with the Amman Message, which is a very important document that was signed by all of the authoritative schools of Islam, and it continued in several initiative by several Muslim scholars, especially around the Tabah Foundation and Sheikh Habib Ali al-Jifri in the United Arab Emirates, with no less than three documents being released. So there is a kind of re-articulating of theological unity that unites all the Muslims. And it is very significant that we are uniting around love of God and love of neighbor; if we cannot love our Shi'i neighbor or our Ibadi neighbor, how can we love our Christian or Jewish neighbor? So our inner unity is what gives us the capacity to unite with all others, and there is no contradiction between the unity of the Muslims and being in respectful and loving relations with other communities—t is unity which gives us the strength to be able to be open to all others.

If I may just add regarding the number of signatories. First of all, the level of representation of each person on that list is different. Someone at the head of the Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesia has millions of followers, and the Mufti of Egypt has millions of followers, whereas academic circles might be smaller, but they might be stronger. The inclusion of Imam Yahya in the signatories and not having more Italians in the signatories does not indicate that other Italian Muslim leaders don't want to sign the document or be included. As a matter of fact we have planned immediately after the Vatican seminar to hold Friday prayers at the Rome Mosque, and we hope that the leaders of the Muslim community in Italy will join us and help us to endorse this, and also to help to bring the Common Word into the preaching of the mosque and the daily activities in communities. And we are not only doing this in Italy, we are doing this in Nigeria and with communities in Pakistan and in India.

It is like cologne: to make a diluted preachable form, you have to have the essence first. And what this document was is having the essence of religiosity as love of God and love of neighbour, then it can be preached in mosques and in madrasas and throughout the world through the efforts of community leaders; and we are quite fortunate to have Imam Yahya with us here in Italy because he has the advantage of being close to the Muslim community and also being close to the

Catholic community and the political community, and he represents youth in Italy, so we feel that figures such as Imam Yahya can help us reach all of the rest of the Muslim community in Italy and in other places.

The President of al-Azhar University, Professor Dr Ahmed al-Tayyib—who is one of the most eminent theologians of Islam today—is a signatory of this document; this is in addition to his excellency the Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa who has a great stature and is held with the utmost respect in the community. If I may just add that the initiative of al-Azhar with the Vatican and there is total coordination between this group and al-Azhar

QUESTION: *Do you think Catholic-Muslim Forum could act as a rapid response to cases such as the cartoon crisis, by issuing declarations and promoting a common initiative to stop such crisis?*

AREF NAYED: Yes, of course, because such structures, especially permanent structures in which communication continues—and when we say we are going to meet every two years that does not mean that we will communicate only every two years—we might communicate every month or every week. When communication channels are open, they are like hotlines so that communities can reach each other and respond to crises and not let things escalate.

QUESTION: *Do you think the Vatican underestimated the importance of Islam and Muslims? As you know, Archbishop Fitzgerald's department was downgraded. Then we had Regensburg and then they suddenly decided that this is important and that Muslims exists and now they have a Cardinal leading the department again. Do you think that was a mistake?*

AREF NAYED: First of all, I would like to say that since the Second Vatican Council and since *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican has held Islam in the highest esteem and has continued to make great efforts to have dialogue with Muslims; and we cannot let one or two bad instances tarnish the history of very hard work done by institutions like the Pontifical Institute for Islamic Studies, and various other efforts done in Lebanon, in Jordan, in Tunisia, in Algeria over many, many years that are well-documented in journal called *Islamochristiana*.

So we do not think that the Vatican ever underestimates the importance of Islam and we do believe that they hold Islam with the highest esteem, and we take the doctrinal statements of *Nostra Aetate* as foundational for the Vatican and every single pope that has come since then has reaffirmed the importance of *Nostra Aetate* including the most recent Pope Benedict XVI. What happened in Germany I personally believe was a huge mistake, but we all make mistakes; some of them are quite spectacular and they tend to be in accord with one's stature—so the bigger the stature the bigger mistakes.

But we must go beyond this. There is a tradition of our Prophet (peace be upon him) which says that every human being makes mistakes, but the best human being is the one who repent and go back to the truth. So so long as we are willing to correct mistakes and learn from each other and love each other in God and go forward, I believe that that is the spirit we should have, rather than just lamentation in grievances.

So I believe that the Vatican takes Islam seriously, and they obviously take this initiative very seriously. The statement of al-Azhar included love of God and love of neighbor in the middle of the statement, and the theme of this particular upcoming seminar is the very theme of the Common World, which means that they take the group of scholars and ulema and Islam seriously; and we likewise take them seriously and that is why we are here.

QUESTION: *Is the initiative speaking in the name of the whole Islamic world?*

AREF NAYED: I'll give you a technological paradigm or metaphor: the internet is a network of networks and every node in the internet is very weak in itself, and every node in the internet does not represent the internet completely, but the network of networks, is very strong, very resilient, because if something is down another part comes up.

In Islam, religious authority is distributed; it is very much networked; and it is a network of networks. What we have tried to do is build a network of mainstream Muslim scholars across the board across regions and across schools. And we believe that with God's help and grace we have succeed in doing this; and we do not intend on dropping the network or neglecting it. We intend on keeping up the

hard work on building more networks to connect to it. How representative is this? I believe that it is very, very representative—because of the people who have signed and because of the nature of the discourse. We believe that it is very important not to see the distribution of authority in Islam as a weakness—because some people say, you have a problem you don't have a Pope. On the contrary, we believe that we are very strong even though we don't have a Pope. Islam functions perfectly without a centralized figure because of this phenomenon of distributed authority. It is God who meant it to be for us this way, and we respect each other across the sects; we respect each other across our theological and sectarian differences. And we can speak collectively—not because of me or him or Imam Yahya or Sohail Nakhoda—but because of the totality of the group. And we thank our great scholars for the confidence that they have given us to participate in these meetings.

QUESTION: *Are there attempts on both sides to make sure women scholars are involved?*

AREF NAYED: Yes indeed. We see our female scholars as great contributors to this. There are already women signatories to the Common Word document and we foresee that all of our delegations be it to the Vatican or to Cambridge or to Yale or to Georgetown will include women scholars—not because they are women but because they are great scholars. It is quite an honour to have such scholars as Ingrid Mattson or Aisha Manai'i of Qatar amongst our teams.



Interview on the “Common Word” Initiative with Catholic News Service

INTERVIEW BY AREF ALI NAYED

CONDUCTED BY CINDY WOODEN

[Following the delivery of “A Common Word”, the ground-breaking and historic open letter to Christian clergy, scholars and leaders calling for peace and greater goodwill between Muslims and Christians, responses varied from open acceptance to soft rejection. Cindy Wooden of the Catholic News Service spoke with Aref Ali Nayed, the chief spokesperson on behalf of the open letter, about what he believes will be achieved by this interfaith initiative, what theological foundation dialogue between Muslims and Christians should rest on, and how Muslim and Christian scriptures are windows rather than walls for increased understanding. We publish here a slightly abridged version of the interview.]

CINDY WOODEN: *How would you describe the dialogue the “A Common Word” project hopes to initiate?*

AREF NAYED: The dialogue, or rather set of dialogues, we hope “A Common Word” will initiate are multifaceted, multilayered, multidisciplinary, and multilateral. It is more a set or matrix of polyphonic discourses that are united through their exclusive focus: loving worship of the One God, and love of our neighbors. The matrix includes theological, spiritual, scriptural, juridical, and ethical discourses. It is to be conducted in cooperation with a broad range of partners from all active Christian churches and denominations including the Catholic, Protestant (both traditional and evangelical), and the Orthodox

communities. The discourses will be with Church leaders, centers of theological studies, spiritual communities, scriptural reasoning and reading groups, and grassroots organizations. We are very much encouraged by the fact that positive responses have already come in abundance from such a multiplicity of nodes of Christian communal life including top Christian leaders, and the world's top theology, divinity, and Islamic studies centers.

CINDY WOODEN: *Would you make a distinction between a "theological" dialogue and a dialogue focused on common moral values and social concerns?*

AREF NAYED: Of course, there is a distinction between theological dialogue and ethical/social dialogue. However, for people who believe in divine revelation as the ultimate font and ground for righteous living, as Jews, Christians, and Muslims do, theology and theological dialogue must be the foundational ground of all other forms of dialogue. Mere ethical/social dialogue is useful, and is very much needed. However, dialogue of that kind happens everyday, through purely secular institutions such as the United Nations and its organizations. If religious revelation-based communities are to truly contribute to humanity, their dialogue must be ultimately theologically and spiritually grounded. Many Muslim theologians are not just interested in mere ethical dialogue of "cultures" or "civilizations". We take our Qur'anic revelation solemnly and seriously, as the very foundation of all our living and all our discourses. Islam is a great deal more than a "culture" or a "civilization". It is a prophetic revelatory religion and heartfelt faith that has been the rich font of multiple cultures and civilizations. If dialogue is to be serious, it must be theologically and spiritually deep.

CINDY WOODEN: *What is your reaction to Cardinal Tauran's statement about Muslims' understanding of the Qur'an?*

AREF NAYED: Cardinal Tauran's statement to Le Croix was very disappointing indeed. It came at a time of high expectation of responsiveness, and on the eve of the important Naples Sant'Egidio encounter. Many people were expecting Pope Benedict XVI to say something positive about the Muslim scholars' initiative. Alas, a truly historic opportunity for a loving embrace was simply missed.

Instead, the Cardinal's statement deeply discouraged Muslim scholars, and annoyed many Muslim believers at the grassroots level. Many such believers blamed their leaders for still approaching the Vatican, given the Cardinal's attitude and the Vatican's non-responsiveness to Muslim scholars last year. The Cardinal's statement was quickly propagated through the press, and almost derailed the whole initiative. Muslim scholars have already expressed their views on the Cardinal's statement in their Communiqué to the Naples encounter. However, the content of the Cardinal's statement does need to be addressed theologically and hermeneutically.

The ill-founded claim by Cardinal Tauran, that dialogue is hindered by Muslim belief that the Qur'an is the very speech of God, clearly suffers from being stuck in a double bind: first, the bind of misunderstanding and misrepresenting Islamic teachings regarding the Qur'an. Second, the bind of misrepresenting, through false contrast, the Catholic doctrine on Christian Scriptures. His statement turns out to be based on ill-founded "Islam versus Christianity" contrast tables developed and advocated by some "Islam experts". Rather than unilaterally declaring the impossibility of theological dialogue with Muslims, Cardinal Tauran would have been wiser to ask Muslim scholars themselves as to what kind of dialogue they feel is possible, from their point of view. To unilaterally pre-determine what is possible and not possible for the other, on behalf of the other, is one sure way of achieving closure in matters dialogical.

CINDY WOODEN: *What is your hope for the next step in the conversation?*

AREF NAYED: Our hope is for a multifaceted and multidimensional matrix of discourses with multiple nodes of Christian leadership, scholarship and wisdom. That matrix is already rapidly emerging, as is evident by the multiple positive responses and initiatives (documented on the open letter's official website). Muslim scholars are most appreciative of such great responses. There is already advanced Muslim-Christian planning for multiple workshops, seminars, meetings, and conferences. May our One God bless the efforts of all men and women of good will, as they strive to sincerely live together in love of God and love of all neighbours. *God knows best!*



From Security to Compassion

[The following essay by the author was originally presented at the U.S.–Islamic World Forum in Doha in 2009 and then published in Tom Heneghan’s Faithworld blog for Reuters on 19 February 2009]

BEING HELD IN THE early days of the Obama presidency, this year’s U.S.–Islamic World Forum in Doha last weekend was particularly luminescent with rays of hope. One was the very fact that its host, the influential Brookings Institution think-tank, invited faith leaders to discuss how to improve the dreadful state of relations between Washington and the Muslim world. The basis for discussion was “A Common Word”, an appeal by 138 Muslim scholars to Christian leaders to join in a dialogue based on the shared commandments to love God and love one’s neighbor.

That a theological and spiritual initiative is of keen interest to policy planners is indeed a fresh ray of light. Basking in that hopeful light, moreover, I had the rare privilege as a Muslim theologian of listening to the U.S. CentCom Commander General David Petraeus expound there on a “network of networks” that constituted a “security architecture” for our Middle East region.

General Petraeus argued that security can only be achieved through a multi-layered and multi-faceted network of networks that involved training, tooling and equipping, information sharing, and infrastructure building.

I very much liked the talk of a network of networks and indeed agreed with the need for training, tooling, information sharing, and infrastructure building. Alas, I had to keep reminding myself, while looking at the elegantly uniformed speaker, that it is a military net-

work of networks that he was advocating and that all those nice-sounding activities pertained to matters military. It turned out that I very much liked the structure of what General Petraeus was proposing, but definitely not its content!

The training we truly need is training in compassionate dialogue between all of us and in compassionate living amongst each other. The tools and equipment we truly need are those of compassionate communication and understanding. The information sharing we truly need is the honest sharing of, and witnessing to, our loftiest ideals and values, and the cooperative shedding of dark stereotypes and caricatures of others. The infrastructures we truly need to build are infrastructures of public and shared spaces in which we respectfully appreciate and cherish each other just as we stand firmly rooted in our respective traditions.

The Obama presidency does *not* need more of the same “security architecture” inherited from the destructive, divisive, and corrosive years of the Bush presidencies. Rather, it urgently needs a fresh “compassion architecture” that is constructive, mending, and healing. Such a compassion architecture can only be communal and cooperative. All religious, spiritual, and philosophical communities, Muslims included, must contribute to it.

Compassion architecture is built on the theological fact that true security can only come from God’s own compassion towards humanity and the compassion of humans towards humans. Compassion is the condition of possibility of true security.

The Common Word initiative, which was launched in October 2007, is an important contribution to an alternative compassion architecture. Its signatories, whose number has since grown to over 300, include Muslim scholars and thinkers of all theological schools, both genders, and all ages and occupations.

The response from Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians has been very positive and several constructive conferences have already been held with them to explore our common ground. Some Jewish scholars have also made positive and encouraging comments and they will be addressed in a similar document.

For example, Muslim scholars met evangelical Christian leaders last summer at a conference at Yale University, for many the first time ei-

ther had sat down to discuss faith with the other. It was a transformative event. The dark and twisted images Muslims and evangelicals often had of each other came tumbling down. A door for compassionate cooperation opened.

Last November, a “Common Word” delegation of two dozen Muslim scholars, led by Grand Mufti of Bosnia Mustafa Cerić, met Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican and held three days of talks with leading Catholic scholars there. The encounter was soothing and healing after the wounds of the Pope’s speech in Regensburg in 2006.

Last month, one of Islam’s top Muslim television preachers, Amr Khaled, toured several Muslim countries including Sudan to rally tens of thousands of young people around the theme of “A Common Word”. The response proved overwhelmingly positive.

Initiatives such as the “Common Word” are giving rise to a “network of networks of compassion” with multiple nodes and growing complexity and interconnectivity. Much like the internet, this network of networks does not depend on any one node. It is robust and resilient precisely because it is so widespread and interconnected. Compassion architecture will rise from a wide variety of initiatives such as “A Common Word” coming together.

In a “stuck” or “jammed” world situation, “A Common Word” hits the reset button with fresh and purified presuppositions. Now, we watch the lights come on in a fresh way, a way that may very well get our world going again. What better presuppositions to start with than Love of God and Love of Neighbour?

Reorienting and purifying intentions is the most important change to make if the Obama “change platform” is to work. Change requires a shift from self-righteous arrogance to attitudes of humility, concern for others, brokenness before God, compassion, and understanding.

What humanity needs most today is a Prophetic teaching of compassion and love. Inherent in “A Common Word” is a lofty, scriptures-based exhortation from which many lessons, sermons, and much guidance can flow.

Today we are all frightened, in one way or another, physically, politically, socially, and economically. For too many years, fear ran our lives both as actors and acted-upon. During those terrible Bush years, the generals and security agencies thrived on offering their “Security

FROM SECURITY TO COMPASSION

Architectures". It is time for true change: change from fear to hope, from hate to love, from madness to sanity, and from cruelty to compassion. The new day is indeed luminescent with rays of hope!

God knows best!



Caring for the Young

[The author was one of the key speakers at the Third Catholic-Muslim Forum held in Rome on 11–13 November 2014. The following is the official text he presented at the event]

WE ARE LIVING in an age that is globalized, monetized, and traumatized. Our world is changing at a breathtaking pace, but is it changing for the better? The global village we once imagined is becoming an intimidating, even threatening, cosmopolis. We live increasingly in atomized societies marked by alienation and loneliness. How can we love our neighbors if we don't know them?

Our global media feasts on catastrophes and atrocities. We are overwhelmed with an unfiltered tidal wave of images and information that can obliterate wisdom and knowledge. Our traditions and beliefs are disintegrating in an onslaught of conflicting ideologies. Our faiths are being challenged and marginalized. Spiritual and human values have been supplanted by market values—by the reign of quantity. Our communities are being polarized by bigotry and fear. Confidence in a better future has been usurped by a sense of insecurity and unease as economies struggle back from an abyss. In my region—in the Arab and Muslim world—we are witnessing horrific levels of violence and brutality that are metastasizing around the world. Desperation is setting in.

It breaks my heart that this is the world our children are inheriting. It is a world fraught with confusion and uncertainty and, yet, I believe, in spite of everything, it is filled with hope.

In 2012 the distinguished Muslim American political scientist and commentator Farid Zakaria delivered a speech at Harvard University's

commencement in which he laid out statistics that painted a stunningly optimistic picture of our times that refutes the doom and gloom scenarios we have become all too accustomed to hearing. He said, “The richest countries of the world are not in any major geo-political or geomilitary competition with one another. No arms races, no proxy wars, no wars, no cold wars among the richest countries of the world. You would have to go back hundreds of years to find an equivalent period of political stability”. He went on, “The number of people who have died as a result of war, civil war and terrorism is down 50% this decade from the 1990s. It is down 75% from the preceding five decades. It is down 99% from the decade before that, which was, of course World War II. [Harvard professor] Steven Pinker argues that we are living in the most peaceful times in human history”. Zakaria continued, saying, “The political stability that we’ve experienced has allowed the creation of a single global economy that has allowed countries from all over the world to participate and flourish. In 1980 the number of countries that were growing at 4% a year was about 60. By 2007 that number had doubled. And even after the financial crisis that number stands today at about 80 [...] The United Nations estimates in the last 50 years poverty has been reduced more than in the preceding 500 years. Most of that reduction has taken place in the last 20”.

While these statistics and assessments are impressive, they are only describing material wealth. Spiritual health and well-being are not considered. Moreover, while all this good news may be true in the big picture, as a Muslim and a Libyan, witnessing my country and my people existing in a state of war, terror, deprivation, and instability, I find it hard to take part in the optimism.

But one of the extraordinary and felicitous side-effects of all the tribulations I’ve just enumerated is that Muslims and Christians are finally beginning to find common ground, despite our differing theologies and long, often conflicted, history. We are coming together as people of faith—as children of Adam—with the understanding that we must urgently work in concert to address the spiritual malaise that is plaguing the modern world. Why is this an imperative? It is because we owe this to those who come after us.

As a father I have a keen sense of the legacy I’m leaving for my children. As an educator I feel honor-bound to share what I’ve learned

with my students to give them knowledge and understanding that will help them make their way in the world. As a theologian I have witnessed how ignorance of true theology, which is overwhelmingly compassionate, has led so many young people from across the Muslim world either away from religion altogether or toward violent extremist heresies. As a social activist, I have seen how engaging with youth can have a powerful transformative impact, not only on their personal lives, but on society as a whole. And as a diplomat I have become acutely aware of the pressing need to identify and prepare talented, capable, honest and ethical young people for leadership roles.

As elders in our community and as people of faith, what is it that we can give to the young in this troubling, yet promising, age? What can we teach them that will help them make their world a better place? The big picture, described by Farid Zakaria, is made up of millions—trillions—of little pictures. And those little pictures can be changed through acts of love and compassion.

Our young people are growing up in a harsh, materialistic, profit-driven, ego-centric, every-man-for-himself world, a world where human achievement is measured by the accumulation of wealth, power and fame. We are living in a world where hubris and brutality are on the rise, where there seems to be no place for the statement in *Matthew* 5:5: “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth”. Our Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him), said, “Let me live among the poor and die among the poor and be raised up among the poor.” Where, in a world that exalts wealth and power, can the poor be exalted in this way?

I truly believe that our most important contribution is to teach the young compassionate action. Our children learn skills, they learn technologies, they learn trades and disciplines, they assimilate information, but if their hearts are hard their learning is empty and their lives are ultimately barren.

The Muslim world has an exploding population. There are more than 108 million young people in the Middle East between the ages of 15 and 29. Around 60% of the population is under the age of 25. And we have the highest unemployment rate on earth. In 2013 ILO Global employment trends for youth between the ages of 15 and 24 stood at an alarming 25% in North Africa and 28% in the Middle East. Even in

affluent countries unemployment and underemployment of the young are major issues contributing to a lack of hope and self-esteem and a range of social illnesses. In countries without wealth, there has been a diaspora of young people to the oil-rich Gulf States, to Europe, and North America that has deprived these societies of the talent they need to develop and prosper. Some European societies have even higher unemployment rates, causing similar psychologies and diasporas.

The quest for material security and well-being is all very well and good, but it isn't enough. If we want to build a better world we must create compassionate, caring societies and the first order of business is to instill compassionate action in our youth. But we can never do this unless we embrace compassion in our own lives. And we cannot embrace compassion as a working principle until we ourselves become truly compassionate. And we cannot become truly compassionate without humility, patience, tolerance, and empathy for our fellow human beings.

Compassion is not an abstract ideal. It is not a passive emotion. It is an active agent for human transformation and social change. Compassion is an essential feature of both our faiths and its home is the heart. The heart is the organ of transformation. God said, on the tongue of His Prophet (peace be upon him), in a *hadith qudsi*, "The whole universe cannot contain Me, but the heart of the believer can contain Me". Our Holy Book, the Noble Qur'an, begins with "*Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*"—"In the Name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate". True religion is infused with compassion, love, and tolerance. The great mediaeval Islamic scholar Imam Ghazali wrote, "The hypocrite looks for faults. The believer looks for excuses". God is Mercy and Compassion and when a believer's heart overflows with Compassion he or she is, without question, at that moment, close to God. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), said "The Compassionate shall be shown compassion by the Compassionate (Blessed and Exalted is He). Have compassion upon those on earth, and the One in heaven shall have compassion upon you." (Bayhaqi, no. 18272, and Ahmed, no. 6478). This compassion is driven by love. Our Prophet made the supplication: "Oh God, make us from those who love one another in God".

So how can we engage our young in a way that will build compas-

sionate societies in this prosperous, impoverished, convenient, difficult, promising, and confusing world? We need to bring compassion to life in our communities and we can only do this through actively engaging with our young people in learning and service.

From innocence as children, youth embrace idealism as they themselves are in the process of becoming. They want to make a better world than the one they inherited. It is a natural inclination. But without faith and compassion, this constructive impulse can mutate into a destructive utopian ideology. It can find expression in fascism, anarchy, and extremism.

As people of faith, we need to roll up our sleeves and work side-by-side with young people to make small, incremental but tangible changes that make life better for our neighbors and neighborhoods and for our communities. We need to help those who are weak and vulnerable, the disabled, the elderly, the ailing—those in need. We need to act as caregivers to our communities. We need to care and act on it. This is compassion. This is the way of our faith. In this way we can build love, and caring societies.

In both our faiths and traditions saints have been the paradigms of compassionate action. They live for their neighbors. They serve their communities. They impart knowledge through service and action, and through the beautiful qualities of character they have perfected. They are humble, patient, generous, forbearing, kind, and, most of all, compassionate. Our Prophet Muhammad was described as “The Qur’an walking”. That is, he was the manifestation of every beautiful human quality.

The first step to giving our youth compassionate solutions is to give them hope. But hope must be real and achievable within our existential condition, human limitations, and inherent incapacities. False hope is what contributes to utopian ideologies. Real hope is based upon a profound understanding of our own frailties and weaknesses. We hear the word “empower” used in social discourse and the intention in the use of this term is by and large a noble one. But as people of faith we know that all power and all strength comes from God. Compassionate activism must be rooted in this understanding.

I once declared to one of our great contemporary sages, Sidi Rajab Al-Turki, “Master, I’ve given up on improving myself. I am not strong

enough for the way of striving (*mujahada*). I cannot overcome my ego (*nafs*) I keep failing no matter how hard I try. Please help me!" He smiled and said, "My son, what you need is 'the way of the crippled'!" I asked, "what is the way of the crippled?" He replied, "The way of the crippled is the way of Sidi Ahmed Rifa'i, who said, 'I am the Sheikh of the crippled! Come to me limping and broken!'" Sidi Rifa'i understood that we cannot save ourselves, that only God can save us, through the mediation of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Simply admit your incapacity (*ajz*) before God. Ask him for compassion, mercy and grace, and ask Him through Muhammad (God's compassion towards us).

It is the intimate relationship we have with the Divine that we must strengthen in ourselves and instill in our young people. The profound knowledge of our helplessness before God does not obviate the demand for action, it underpins it, and invests our actions with deep humility that protects us from hubris and egotism.

Many of our young people are witnessing and experiencing unspeakable violence, and criminal action-committed fanatics lusting for power, in the name of ideology and religion. They are witnessing and experiencing suffering that no one should ever have to experience. If they have lost their way it is only because those in power have abused their trust. If our youth are despairing of their future, it is our duty to restore their hope and this is possible through compassionate action informed by deep wisdom.

We cannot and must not, as men and women of faith, allow our children to lose hope in their future. We must act before it is too late. We must build bridges of understanding with our young people, to gain their respect and trust, their friendship and their help. We must partner with them so that we leave for them and their progeny an even better and brighter future rather than a future that promises insecurity, suffering, inequity, deprivation, depleted natural resources, and an environment that has been polluted and ruined.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), advises those at the end of time who are desperate to hold on to the "trunk of a tree" even "with their teeth" (Ahmed, no. 16818, and 23043). In these troubled times of ours, we should be planting trees for all of us to hold on to. The trees we need to plant, though, cannot be cultivated through theologies that exalt power, but, rather, through theologies infused

VATICAN ENGAGEMENTS

with humility. In my own life, I have found the best theologians to be simple, down-to-earth men and women of wisdom, sages who understood that “Incapacity to comprehend is itself a comprehension” (*Al-Durr al-Thamin, Umm al-qua'id*). We must recognize and acknowledge our own essential incapacity before God so that He, may He be exalted, can cover our incapacity with His Capacity. All Divine Revelations are based upon the fundamental truth that mankind is powerless and God is all-powerful. All true theology begins with human incapacity and Divine capacity. We need to renew our understanding of this fundamental truth and impart it to our youth.

By invoking our Lord and turning our affairs to Him, by living lives of compassion and love of our neighbors, by serving our communities, we can participate in the positive, constructive, and healing transformation of our world, one step at a time. This is the source of compassionate action. We need to engage our young in this transformative process in ways that make a difference. In this way, we gain their trust, we impart knowledge, we receive knowledge, we give hope, we counter forces of darkness, and we make our world a better place now and for the future.

PART NINE



THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS AND LECTURES



Ayatology and Rahmatology: Islam and the Environment

IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW where to begin in discussing “Islam and the environment”; writing and reflection on this theme have, to date, been very scarce.¹ This seems to me to demonstrate something of a crisis in contemporary Muslim theology; in light of this, I propose to examine the preconditions of a Muslim theology of the environment rather than to give citations from the Qur’an and the Sunna in an attempt to show that Islam is as profound on this question as the latest books on ecology. The latter approach, where people will seek to find verses from the Qur’an or Sunna that validate the latest ecological theory, is common, but it seems to me that that kind of theology, while it may be good apologetics, is neither deep nor useful.

Muslim theology was at one point a great edifice of writings, from which we still benefit today; it was the articulation from generation to generation of what Muslims believed most deeply. During the Abbasid period, even as late as the Ottoman period, theologians worked carefully to articulate their faith (*iman*). Unfortunately, there has been a certain stagnation in this area more recently; it is problematic that nobody of the stature of al-Ghazali, al-Ash‘ari, or al-Maturidi has been produced lately. It seems to me that many of the problems experienced by Muslim communities today are linked to bad preaching, which can in turn be traced to bad, inadequate, or weak theology. I believe that many of our problems cannot be addressed only by political or social or economic means; they require deep and critical self reflection at a theological level. The question I pose is this: What fundamental notions have we lost sight of, the absence of which has led to a poor theology of the environment?²

There are notions in the Qur'an that are very important to invoke and that have been invoked in recent writing on the environment, such as *islah*, "mending," and its opposite, *fasad* or *ifsad*, the "corruption" of the earth, or the "balance," *mizan*, spoken of in the Qur'an, and the disturbing of this balance. These are important notions deserving much further reflection. However, I would rather focus on two other realities. The first is *aya*, "sign," and the second is *rahma*, "compassion." I propose exploring how the rehabilitation of *ayat* and *rahma* can help us to derive a Muslim theology of the environment that is sustaining for our preaching and so can lead to improved conditions in our environment. Muslim countries today are among the most polluted in the world; where they are not polluted is only due to a lack of industrialization or development, and when industrialization does take place, they become extremely polluted. My own country of Libya is an example of this. In the 1960s, before development took place, the environment was wonderful, but this was destroyed in the 1970s by the building of cement factories that have blighted the coastline and depleted the water table. Problems of this kind in our praxis surely point to something wrong with our theology—not with our religion (*din*) as such, for this is based on revelation (*wahy*), but with our articulation and understanding of our faith.

Ayatology: A World of Signs

The word *aya* is repeated many times in the Qur'an: the Qur'an is indeed a cluster of *ayat* that continually refer to *ayat*.³ This is often translated as (divine) "signs," yet the more one reads the Qur'an the more one realizes that there are more to *ayat* than signification in the sense of just "pointing to." *Ayat* are dynamic, operative, transformative processes. I believe that one project necessary for the rehabilitation of Muslim theology today is the articulation of what we can call "ayatology," the science that studies divine indicative processes. Just as we have the "monadology" of Leibniz or the "phenomenology" of Husserl, so it should be possible to construct a science of "ayatology," informed not only by the Qur'an, the Sunna, and tradition, but also by such fields as speech-act theory, pragmatics, semiotics, and hermeneutics.

What is this ayatology about? Ayatology is an Islamic theology that

begins with Allah as *al-rahman*, the source of all compassion, and is hence ultimately deeply related to “rahmatology”, the second dimension of theology discussed here. Allah’s compassion is manifest dynamically, actively, and continuously in transformative processes that keep indicating him all the time. These processes are called *ayat*, they can be seen as activities and sometimes as things. Ayatology as ontology attempts to offer typologies of *ayat* and to describe how we can account for things, events, acts, and artifacts. *Ayat* as divine indicative and transformative activities demand human engagement. This engagement is dynamic and dialogical. It is dialogical in that it is an active and mutually transformative exchange between the seer (being also himself or herself an *aya*) and the *aya* that he or she happens to be considering. It is also dialogical in the sense of engaging other human *ayat* who are themselves seeking to engage the same *aya* or other similar *ayat*. Ayatology attempts to offer typologies of modes of *aya*-engagement and how they work.

I have given a general summary of what ayatology is about, but let me try to express this in simpler terms. One of the most important and devastating factors that has led to the lack of a theology of the environment in Islam is that we have adopted the modern way of looking at things as mere things. This has been the source of many of our problems; even when we wish to develop a theology of the environment, we presuppose that the environment is a cluster of things—although we may say that it is a balanced or an elegantly built cluster of things. Once you assume the “thingliness” of the environment, you have already lost the necessary presupposition; you cannot produce a Muslim theology of the environment if you look at things as mere things.

So we must rehabilitate our ability to see “things” as *ayat*, so that when we look at things we are aware of their indicative, transformative divine source and also their destination. When you look at a tree, for example, you should be seeing through its trace (*athar*) the divine *faʿil*, the act of creation. Through the *faʿil*, you should be able to ascend to the divine *ism*, name, which has brought forth this activity. Through the divine name, you would reach the corresponding divine *sifa*, attribute, and from the *sifa* the divine essence, *dhat*. This sequence of trace–act–name–attribute–essence means that everything that is seen in the world is seen as a gateway to Allah, a way to commune with, to

be in the presence of, and worship him. If we only see things in themselves as things, we are basically looking at the door as a wall; we are not opening the door to go farther. Once this foundational point is missed, all is lost. Even Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah al-Iskandari, the great Maliki scholar and Shadhili sheikh, says, “When the beginnings are luminescent, the ends are also luminescent”. When we begin with things as things, we lose track and can end up only with things. No matter how much we say or think about the environment, if we look at trees, stones, animals, human beings in this way, there is no way out of the lock of the thingliness of things.

The rehabilitation of a discourse on *ayat* is a huge challenge, because in Islamic history the *ayat* have been forgotten in favor of notions such as *wujud*, being. In early Muslim theology, there is scarcely any talk of *wujud*, but when the philosophers arrive, the *to on* of the Greeks replaces the *ayat*. The process can be traced through al-Juwayni, al-Ghazali, and al-Razi to al-Taftazani until in the Ottoman theologians the emphasis is entirely on *wujud*. This is the case also in the Shi‘i tradition, where for Mulla Sadra *wujud* is the start of the whole discourse. I believe that to begin in this way with “being” leads to a tendency toward “thingliness” in approach. It is imperative to begin with something more divine and more basic than being. This sounds strange, as we normally think of ontology as most fundamental, yet I believe that *rahma*, “compassion,” is more fundamental than being.

Rahmatology: A World Manifesting Divine Compassion

If we read the Qur’an and Sunna carefully, we find that being as such is only a manifestation of divine *rahma*. Being itself is a gift, and that gift is because of a tendency to gift, al-rahmaniyya, which is Allah Himself. Thus there is a direct link between *rahma* and *aya*, between rahmatology and ayatology. *Ayat* are intrinsically related to *rahma* because if it were not for God’s compassion toward us he would not have shown us things—*ayat* are ultimately a kind of showing, a transformative showing that changes us. This is a showing that can be taken into the heart, leading to transformation from the inside. This transformative showing is a divine compassion, so that when you are looking at the tree you can receive a manifestation of *rahma* of sorts. Of

course, if you see things in this way it will be impossible simply to destroy the tree in the name of technological exploitation.

For Muslims, this ayatology is definitely normative. Allah did not leave us to our whims when it comes to engaging the *ayat*. On the contrary, He gave us plenty of advice on this subject. The Qur'an is remarkable in being a set of *ayat* that tells us how to deal with *ayat*. It is not possible here to give an account of all the Qur'anic guidance in this matter, but one or two points may be emphasized. Primarily, there is a divine promise that those who are arrogant will not see the *ayat*; the first rule in ayatology must be the invocation of humility, of a feeling of poverty before Allah and before his creatures. The creation should be seen in a sense as a set of teachers: Ibn al-ʿArabi, for example, describes how, walking past a gutter, he came to the realization: "One of my masters is a gutter." He had seen how the gutter gathered the waters and put them in one place, and so he learned how to focus. In this case, even something manufactured could be seen as a teacher.

This attitude of humility does not fit well with the "thingliness" attitude that we normally have. One of the most devastating occurrences in Muslim history was when, under pressure from colonialism and the scientific thinking of the West, many Islamic scholars began to develop a kind of scientistic theology. In an attempt to escape from a misty mysticism, a very positivistic Kant-like theology was developed: *Islam din al-ʿilm*, "Islam is the religion of knowledge", where *ʿilm* (knowledge) is here taken as equivalent to "science". *ʿIlm* traditionally, however, included such elements as humility; as Imam Malik said, "*ʿIlm* is a light that is thrown into the heart". As *ʿIlm* came to be thought of as science, so *ayat* came to be thought of as "things." There was indeed historical precedence for this in Muslim history through the introduction from Greek thought of the idea of *wujud*, being. By the time of al-Afghani and ʿAbduh, this results in theologies that are quite scientistic in their assumptions and that include few references to *ayat*.

To return to the Qur'anic teaching: The first point is the need to be free of *istikbar*, the belief that I am bigger than the *aya*, that I am the subject and it is the object, that I am its conqueror, that I am the doer and the *ayat* the done-to. I must learn to stand in humility before the *aya*. The second Qur'anic rule is the imperative to respond to the *ayat*. I must respond by recognizing that the *ayat*, all the things that

surround me, are gifts. Amid such gifts, I must make the response of *shukr*, gratitude or thanks. *Shukr* is so important in Islam that in several *ayat* it is equated with Islam itself; infidelity, *kufr*, is the opposite of gratitude. If we are not grateful for that which we receive, we are committing a crime against Allah. The destruction of gifts is in fact called *kufr*, an infidelity involving rejection or covering up of gifts. The response of gratitude involves not destroying them, and it also requires that we share them so that we can spread them. Moreover, if one of the gifts is in some sense breaking down, it must be repaired—this *islah* becomes a form of *shukr*; equally and oppositely, *ifsad*, “destruction,” becomes a form of *kufr*.

The Qur’an therefore teaches the ethics of humility and of gratitude in relation to the *ayat*. It is very interesting to see that within the Qur’an’s presentation of the *ayat* there is no clear delineation between us and the environment. We are ourselves *ayat*, and the environment is a set of *ayat*. The Prophets also are *ayat*, and the books of God are *ayat*. The natural processes we see, such as the alternation of night and day, are *ayat*; the miracles of the Prophets are also *ayat*. Within this ocean of *ayat* it is possible to develop some typologies. For example, on the one hand there are the *ayat* of the horizons, and on the other hand the *ayat* of the inward. There are great *ayat* and there are small *ayat*, and so on. Despite the development of such typologies, the Qur’an clearly presents the *ayat* as a continuum; there is no severance between the human being and the environment. Thus it is not right to speak of “us and the environment”. Rather, we are the environment; we are each other’s environment, we are an environment to our own environment, and our environment is an environment to us. Any severance between us and the environment, any language of doing things to the environment, even of preserving the environment as an object, is problematic according to a Qur’anic *ayatology*.

Responding to *Aya* and *Rahma*

People’s reactions to the *ayat* differ. Those who take the *ayatin* the right way in the Qur’an are described as those who ask, those who believe, those who understand, grasp, or know, those who are alert. This is a kind of awareness, rather like the “seeing” of the Hebrew Bible; it is also a kind of waiting, acceptance, patience, or humility. The

opposite attitude is that of not hearing, not caring, ignoring, being arrogant, having a stony heart toward the *ayat*. The Qur'an describes this also in terms of not bowing before the Qur'an, as in several places where the *ayat* of Allah are presented, people fall down before them, so great is their reverence. This reverence arises because people do not see the things in themselves but see Allah through the *ayat*, through the sequence of trace-act-name-attribute-essence described before. Although the divine essence can be seen by nobody, this provides a trajectory leading toward it, so that the *aya* becomes a gateway rather than a wall, an opening rather than a closure. Thus those who take all things around them with the right attitude as *ayat* are on the way to salvation; those who take them with another attitude as things lead themselves, and others, to destruction. This is the clear teaching of the Qur'an.

The second key dimension required for a Muslim theology of the environment is that of *rahma*. As explained earlier, the very manifestation of *ayat* the fact that we are granted *ayat*, is because of Allah's *rahma*. It is surprising, if one looks at the treatment of the sign by al-Ash'ari or al-Maturidi, the founders of the two orthodox schools of Sunni theology, to see the conspicuous absence of the *ayat*. This absence is for historical reasons rather than for any spiritual reason; even al-Baqillani speaks of *lutf*, grace, and in Ibn al-'Arabi there is a huge discourse on *rahma*. In listing the twenty signs recognized in the creed, though, there is little reference to the names *al-rahman* or *al-rahim*. *Rahma* is not emphasized; rather, emphasis is placed on *irada*, will, and *'ilm*, knowledge.

This seems to me to be problematic in our time. In the days of al-Ash'ari and al-Maturidi, the centrality of *rahma* was so well-known that it did not need to be articulated. They drank, as it were, of *rahma* in their daily water and their daily meals, and their societies were in many ways quite compassionate. Moreover, this continued until recent times—the ways in which communities in North Africa would deal with each other in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, was far from the greed, cruelty, and individualism we see today. We seem to have lost a sense of mutual compassion, and in light of this loss it is now time to rearticulate the centrality of *rahma*. The great theologians of the past were not uncompassionate people; indeed, many of them were

great Sufis and spiritual masters. However, this has been forgotten or neglected today, partly because of a discourse coming from scientism.⁴

In this way, I believe that the lack of discourse on *rahma*, and the lack of practice of *rahma*, have led us into a crisis. The abundance of cruelty that we see around us in so many societies today is by no means restricted to the Islamic world, but if we can recover the sense of the environment as a set of *ayat*, teeming, puzzling, and marvelous activities of God springing from His *rahma*, then we can rehabilitate an Islamic theology that will help us out of the crisis we face.

REFERENCES

¹ This essay is reconstructed from an audio recording of the lecture given by the author at the Building Bridges seminar in Sarajevo.

² To use the terminology of R. G. Collingwood, “absolute presuppositions”.

³ The word *aya* (pl. *ayat*) refers not only to natural things in their capacity as signs (as developed by the author in this essay) but also to verses of the Qur’an.

⁴ It is interesting to note in this regard how many Islamists are engineers. There seems to me a kind of engineering attitude in Islamism that can be very harmful for theology, as it leads to the attitude that you can just do things to things—including people among “things”.

[First published in *Building a Better Bridge: Muslims, Christians, and the Common Good*, ed. Michael Ipgrave (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008, 161–167)]



Attacking the Essence: On Why Muslims are so Hurt by the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* Outrage

AS IF OUR TRAGICALLY torn-apart world needed more strife, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* outraged devout Muslims with its publication of caricatures that purported to depict and satire our beloved Prophet and Messenger Muhammad (Allah's peace and blessings be upon him), and thereby caused even more strife.

The story of the publication, and the time-line of the reactions to it are well documented by such Websites as that of the BBC, and need no further summarization here. The tragic consequences of the publication continue to unfold even as I write this note. Earlier today, the Danish embassy in Beirut was torched by an angry crowd.

Just as Muslims are outraged by the publication, and by the Danish Government's arguments from "Free Speech", many Europeans are outraged by what they see as Muslim "overreaction" to the publication, and by the supposed undermining of "Free Speech".

There seems to be an amazingly deep misunderstanding of how serious the outrage is, and of the far-reaching and dark consequences that will inevitably, and tragically follow, over the coming weeks, months, and even years. The recent torching of embassies in Damascus and Beirut is only an indicator of the terrible downwards spiral into which we are all quickly sinking.

The purpose of this note is to explain to Europeans, who are interested in understanding Muslim reactions to the *Jyllands-Posten* publication, some of the reasons for the depth of the hurt and of the outrage felt by Muslims.

The feelings and behavior of others that can seem senseless, and even irrational, often have reasons that are too alien to readily understand. Such alien reasons need to be explained through approximations and bridging concepts so as to bring them into the domain of the thinkable.

It is hoped that the explanation of reasons can prepare for a possible sorting out of deep differences, and contribute to an eventual peace. It must be pointed out, from the outset, that the giving of reasons is not a justification of the unpredictably terrible consequences that are now following, and are bound to continue to follow.

The need to defend "Free Speech" has been the main reason given by *Jyllands-Posten* for publishing the offending drawings in the first place. Free Speech has also been the main reason given for every other republication (by other European newspapers) that followed. Free Speech, for many Europeans, is so "sacred", it has to be asserted (as in the first publication) and defended (as in the deliberate republications). In much of the literature surrounding the controversy, Muslims are blamed for not understanding how sacred to Europeans Free Speech is.

Let us start with this notion of "Free Speech". No Muslim can fail to appreciate how important Free Speech is, especially given the tyrannical conditions under which most Muslims live. However, everyone knows that "Free Speech" cannot be totally free. It is recognized by all, that Free Speech can not be a free license to insult, offend, and attack others. Every law that upholds Free Speech also provides for protections against "defamation".

Upon the publication of the offending drawings, Danish Muslims immediately recognized that the drawings are an act of defamation rather than an instance of Free Speech. They filed official complaints under Danish Law.

Unfortunately, their complaints were quickly shot down by Danish authorities. The situation we are now facing could have been avoided had Danish authorities attempted to understand how the drawings constituted defamation, and acted to correct the situation. Complaints to executive government authorities led to even more denials of defamation, and even refusals to recognize that there is a problem to address.

It is clear that Danish legal and executive authorities simply saw the drawings as “mere” speech that has been “freely exercised”. They clearly saw the subject of the drawings as a “mere” historical figure that has been “freely” satirized (along with some Danish politicians). The Prime Minister didn’t even see the need to meet with Muslim diplomats that wanted to complain to him about the publication.

To begin to understand Muslim outrage at the *Jyllands-Posten* publication, it is essential to understand the following facts, as a Muslim sees them:

1. Speech is not just a mere set of utterances, texts or drawings. Speech is a set of acts (as is clearly understood by speech-act theory and pragmatics).
2. The subject of the drawings is not a mere historical figure. The subject of the drawings is the Prophet and Messenger of Islam, Muhammad (Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him).

Thus, the “mere” speech about a “mere” historical figure turns out to be an actual act upon Islam’s Prophet and Messenger (Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him).

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is so revered by Muslims, he is not be made the ‘subject’ of any depiction. This is because no depiction can ever be good enough to capture his perfection. This is also because a depiction that even comes slightly close to capturing some of his perfection may well lead to idolatry of the image. The very idea of making the Prophet a subject of a depiction is not acceptable to Muslims (at least for the Muslim Sunni majority).

All people can readily recognize that a speech, be it in words or images, is a sort of act. People can also recognize that sometimes speech, *qua* act, can be injurious, insulting, derogatory, and hostile. The fact that there are laws in all countries against ‘defamation’ is a testament to that recognition. The defamation of sacred matters is also often prohibited (even in many European countries) as “blasphemy”. It is recognized that a speech-act can constitute a hostile act or attack.

Muslims clearly see, without any shadow of doubt, the outrageous drawings purporting to depict Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as hostile acts or attacks. This is the main reason counter-

hostile acts or counter-attacks have followed, and will inevitably continue to follow. The distinction between speech violence and actual physical violence has not been, and will not be, upheld.

The reason such a distinction is not upheld, has to do with the following three facts:

1. In Islamic jurisprudence and in Arabic culture in general, the distinction between verbal and non-verbal acts is not so clear-cut. Insulting someone and hitting them tend to be considered of the same gravity, and are both considered attacks.
2. The higher value and dearness of the subject of a verbal attack tends to collapse the distinction between the verbal and the non-verbal even further. For example, insulting someone's mother is readily considered more aggressive and terrible than actually physically hitting that person himself.
3. No one is of higher value or dearer to Muslims than the Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings be upon him). It is actually Muslim doctrine that no one is truly faithful unless the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is dearer to him than even himself, his family, and all humanity.

It is extremely important that Europeans understand that the "mere" satirical speech of the *Jyllands-Posten* is deeply felt, by Muslims, as an actual and terrible, emotional and physical, attack on the most beloved person in the entirety creation.

No amount of explaining can even come close to expressing how beloved and dear the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is to the heart and the very being of a Muslim. However, it is worthwhile striving to explain how drastically different this kind of love is from love that is commonly encountered. Now, Allah (may He be exalted), our very Creator and Sustainer, is the very focus of our hearts and minds. Allah (may He be exalted) is loved and worshiped, exclusively, and totally, as our God and Creator.

Muslims do not worship Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, Muslims live their very love for Allah (may He be exalted) through the loving and following of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). This is extremely important to recognize. A Muslim

lives his love for Allah (may He be exalted) through his love for, and following of, Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Attacking Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is attacking the very gateway to Allah (may He be exalted). The exalted Lordship of Allah can only be approached through the love and emulation of the humble devotion of His worshiper and servant Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

Arguments that Muslims should not be so angry at the caricatures of a “mere” human exhibit a total and deep misunderstanding of who Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is for Muslims. To attack Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is to attack our very way to Allah (may He be exalted).

As the humble, total, and devoted worshiper of Allah (may He be exalted), Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is the very exemplar or model of the perfect human being. Every Muslim strives all his life, with all his heart, mind, and body, to emulate and follow the example of the perfect exemplar. To attack the exemplar of all Muslims is to attack every single Muslim. This is why every single Muslim deeply feels the hurt and the injury caused by the outrageous drawings.

Furthermore, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), through his ethical, juridical, and spiritual instructions and example is the very source of valuation in the lives of Muslims. To attack and undermine the source of all valuation of a community is to attack and undermine the very values of the entire community.

In Europe, because of, and through its own peculiar historical struggles and choices there are secularists who have largely done away with religious beliefs. Such secularists may find it difficult to understand feelings of reverence and deep love and respect for a gateway to the divine. Such secularists may find alien the notion of an ultimate and sublime font of all valuations and all values. Perhaps this is why such secularists fail to understand, today, why Muslims are so hurt by a “mere” publication of “mere” drawings.

It is important to point out, however, that secularists, through dominance of universities and the media, often have a louder voice than religious Europeans. Many religious Europeans do appreciate the sacred, and can indeed understand the reverence that the sacred de-

mands. The announcements by the Vatican, and some other churches, criticizing the defamation of religious figures and symbols, are a sign of hope to Muslims.

Perhaps it is dialogue between Muslims and believing Europeans, who know the meaning of the sacred and of worship, that can open the door to a process of healing of Muslim–European relations.

It is also important for Muslims, despite the seemingly continuous and varied attacks coming from the West that the West is a very complex matrix, and that in the West, there are many sincere human beings who are genuinely trying to understand Islam and Muslims, and to live with them in peace. We Muslims must not let the ignorant and irresponsible acts of some secularists ruin our relationships with the entire West.

Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is Allah's very compassion for all of us and for all worlds. To truly defend him and his ways, we must truly live and act in compassion. Let us not use the attacks on him as an excuse to unleash violent whims and desires. Let us channel our deep hurt and sorrow into compassionate work for our troubled world,

Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is attacked because he is not truly known. If he is known as he truly is, as Allah's compassion to humanity and the worlds, the world would be living in mutual-compassion. We Muslims are responsible for letting the world know who Muhammad is, not through talk only, but through our very deeds, conduct, and character.

May Allah save us all from the wars and strife of our times, and show us the way to a peaceful, respectful, and compassionate co-existence.



The Usurpation of God's Greatness

SELF-RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT is the very foundation on which every abuse of power and violence committed in the name of God is based. Abuse committed in the name of God is based on judgement in the name of God. In this paper I shall reflect on the phenomenon of judging-in-God's name in preparation for our later discussions about abusing power and violence in God's name.

Judging in God's name is a phenomenon that thrives in all religious communities. I will therefore treat it as such, and will not focus on its manifestations in any one particular community. However, as I reflect on this phenomenon, I will have in mind manifestations of it within and amongst, religious communities centered around heavenly texts, more specifically, the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities.

Let us note from the outset that as a man judges another in the name of God, he implicitly denies that he himself is doing the judging. This is seemingly paradoxical but a moment's reflection will suffice to show that judging in God's name amounts to claiming that God is doing the judging. Let us then note that judging in the name of God involves a basic element of self-denial.

When a man judges another in the name of God, he in effect says: "God judges you thus!" The judgemental man takes what we may call a "noting stance", He thinks of himself as merely noting or pointing out that God judges his brother thus. He thinks that he has nothing to do with the actual making of the judgment. God makes the judgement. He merely points it out.

Self-Denying Self-Righteousness

It is this basic self-denying attitude of the judgemental man that fills

him with a peculiar, and most dangerous, kind of self-righteousness, a self-righteousness that sees itself as God-righteousness. The question of whether his judgement is right or wrong does not arise in the mind of the judgmental man for the simple reason that he thinks himself not to be doing any judging at all. God is the one who is doing the judging, and of course God cannot be wrong. If you insist on it, you may get the judgmental man to admit that he thinks himself right. But if he does so, he will quickly point out that he is right because he simply and rightly notes or points out that God judges thus, and God is of course always right.

When a man judges another in the name of God, he usually goes on, if he can, to act upon this judgement. Who wouldn't feel an obligation to immediately and faithfully follow up and implement a divine judgement? The self-righteousness that disguised itself, to itself, as God-righteousness, now gives rise to an attitude of detached cold impunity in the carrying out of actions that must now follow up the judgement. If we wonder why it is that men, invoking the name of God, commit the most atrocious acts with almost joyful impunity, then let us remember that as far as those men are concerned, it is God, and not themselves, who is judging. Such men think that they are piously implementing God's own, necessarily righteous, judgements.

But where do religious men get divine judgements from? Surely they do not just make them up. Irreligious men may believe they can just make up their own judgements and act upon them. But religious men are precisely religious because they do not believe that man can make up all the judgements that he needs.

Surely, also, the number of men who think that God directly and vividly talks to them and provides them with his fully articulated judgements is quite small (in the non-shamanic religious communities I here have in mind). Where is it then that religious men go to get God's judgements on the things, events, and people that surround them?

Well, many people go to the religious authorities in their communities for authoritative judgements. But few people come back from a visit to their local religious authority saying that God himself judges thus. In such cases there is a buffer of sorts that works to mitigate the authority of the judgment so that it does not have the same directness or force as a judgment attributed directly to God.

Religious authorities are usually recognized as human even by the most pious and naive of believers, and this recognition works to make one put the matter in the form "So-and-so, our local so-and-so, says that God judges thus" and not "God judges thus". It is true that the religious authority one appeals to is, implicitly, ultimately recognized as having access, somehow, to what God Himself judges. But there is usually the sense, even if it is neither noticed nor stated, that "So-and-so" contributes a fallible human element to the whole matter.

Of course, this mitigating effect is not always present. In some communities, in some periods, and in some circumstances religious authorities are taken to be speaking directly for God, or even more strongly, to be God himself speaking. In such cases, judging in the name of God takes the form of a two-in-one self-denying pointing activity. The believer in effect points to the religious authority, and the religious authority points to God as the one who is doing the judging.

We have seen how it is that a man judging another in God's name typically denies, even to himself, that he is doing the judging, and thinks of himself as a mere pointer to the fact that God Himself judges thus. The key to understanding judgment in God's name is understanding how it is that humans manage to be so oblivious to their own role in such judging.

Of course, humans are not always oblivious to this role. At times they even foster their role in judging, and deliberately and strategically disguise it from others so that they can manipulate others in God's name. Such evil men do exist, and, like liars and swindlers, are part of the furniture of our world.

It is not wise, however, to make our study focus on the activities of deliberate deception in the name of God. It is tempting to focus on such activities because they are obviously dangerous. However, if we do so we would likely fall in the hands of one of two temptations.

The first temptation, to which secularists are the most likely victims, is that of thinking that all judging in God's name is simply fraudulent manipulation.

The second temptation, to which religious people are the most likely victims, is that of thinking that every religious God-invoking person who disagrees with us (especially if he happens to be from another religious community) is involved in fraudulent manipulation.

In order to avoid falling victim to these two temptations, it is best to focus our attention on activities of judging in God's name that are based on self-deception and not on the deliberate deception of others. This is certainly a more insidious and dangerous variety of judging in God's name, and it is a variety on which no one has a monopoly. We can all fall victim to the self-righteous invocation of God's judgments, when in fact the judgments we are invoking are largely our own.

Where Do We Get God's Judgements From?

But how is it that we invoke God's judgments in a manner that keeps our role out of the picture? To return to our earlier question, "Where do we get God's judgments from?" Well, the bases for judgements in God's name are usually direct appeals to texts believed to be God's own scriptures or writs. If we want to understand how it is that judgment in God's name works, we must strive to understand how it is that the sourcing of judgments from God's scriptures works. The phenomenon of judging in God's name turns out to be a hermeneutical phenomenon, and it has to do with the similes or models often implicitly or explicitly used in understanding what sacred texts are like and how they are to be approached.

Simile is a wonderful instrument of thinking. It can help us grasp complicated things with incredible ease. Simile, however, can also lead us astray into incredible difficulties. Simile consists in comparing something which is unfamiliar or complicated to something that is familiar and simple so that the understanding we have of the familiar helps us achieve a similar understanding of the unfamiliar.

The simile between treasure chests and sacred texts has been a popular one. Again and again we find a community's sacred text compared to a box into which the believer can delve and emerge with pockets full of goodies. Usually the treasure chest comes complete with the key, which, of course, religious authorities, with their hermeneutical manuals and authoritative exegesis, keep in trust! The self-righteous attitude associated with judgment in God's name usually assumes at least a tacit acceptance of this simile or another akin to it (the garden with lots of fruits waiting to be plucked is another popular one). The judgments of God are thought to simply lie there in the box waiting to be pointed out. According to this model, the man who judges his

brother in the name of God simply points to a ready-made divine judgment contained in the community's sacred text.

Now, the key with which the simile usually comes tends to suggest a necessary effort or contribution by the judgemental man. This is not what the key is for, however. The real purpose of the key is to keep unauthorized intruders from having access to God's judgements and invoking them against authorized personnel. Times of turmoil in religious communities are usually times when several keys (each purporting to be the real one) are in circulation, or when the authority of a particular group as key-keepers becomes challenged. In such times God's alleged judgments fly back and forth, and a great deal of damage, sometimes of devastating proportions, is done.

The problem with the simile of the treasure chest is that it encourages an attitude of turning to ready-made, off-the-shelf judgments and simply directing them towards the thing, event, or persons being judged. All along, God is assumed to be the maker and shelf-stocker of the judgments. Judgments are thought to pass from God to whatever or whomever they fall upon without the interference or involvement of their invoker. When the simile of the treasure-box is assumed, judgments are made with no sense of personal responsibility, and with total self-righteousness (as assumed God-righteousness). The judgemental then go on to implement (in a cold, soldierly manner) what they take to be God's own judgements.

I believe that there are at least two things that we can do in order resist our tendency to make judgements in God's name without taking stock of our own fallible human contribution to the process of judging. The first is to get away from simplistic models of texts and their interpretation that encourage regarding the interpreting as the mere collecting of ready-made tokens. The second is to develop alternative similes and models of texts and their interpretation that emphasize the complexity of the process of interpretation and its involvement of a variety of human factors that always condition its outcome.

Wanting to find ready-made divine judgements in our sacred texts is a natural tendency. This tendency has to do with our longing for God's judgments. This longing for divine judgement is motivated by our recognition of the differences between God's judgements and our own judgments.

All judgment requires knowledge of the matters pertaining to the case being judged, knowledge of a criterion according to which the judging can be done, and a faculty of judging.

God's knowledge is comprehensive and all encompassing. It is also thoroughly detailed. God is the creator and knower of all true criteria. God's faculty for judging is totally efficient and efficacious. Human knowledge is partial and limited. It can only be relatively and partially detailed. Human criteria are imperfect and have no solid grounds. The human faculty of judging is inefficient, not always effective, and most importantly fallible.

Furthermore, the horizons in which humans make judgements are limited and relative. The horizon in which God makes His judgements is unlimited and absolute. God is not only absolutely judge, He is the ultimate judge.

Our Taking, Our Listening, and Our Sourcing is Always Ours

We recognize all this, and we run to sacred texts wishing to find, ready-made and there-for-the-taking, God's judgements. God's judgements are indeed in our sacred texts. God, in His benevolence and compassion did send human prophets to us in order to tell us of His existence, and of the things that lie ahead of us after this life. And God's prophets did give us sacred texts that do indeed contain, somehow, God's very judgements.

However, God's judgements don't just sit there to be had, and they are not ready-made tokens that we can just throw at our neighbors. God's judgments have to be listened to, they have to be sourced, they have to be taken. Yes, they are indeed given, but they have to be taken also. Our taking, our listening, and our sourcing is always ours. Though God's judgements are pure in themselves, our handling of them as we attempt to take them, as we attempt to source them, gives them a good dose of our own desires, ambitions, prejudices, and, yes, judgments.

All sourcing of sacred texts involves human judgements about God's judgements. From God the saving greatness, and from us the elements that make our understanding of that saving greatness limited, conditioned, and fallible. Though we can, and must, run away from a life of living according to our own judgement to the saving power of God's

own judgment, we should not think that our attempt to escape will succeed completely in this life. Let us remember that there will always be, there lurking in our very act of listening to God's judgment, traces, and sometimes many elements of human judgement.

This should not discourage us though, and does not in the least diminish the value of our continuous attempts at sourcing divine judgments from our sacred texts. The continuous quest for good refreshing water (which we necessarily taint with a bit of mud and oil, through the very acts of drilling for it and pumping it) is much better than being content with large amounts of mud and oil for a daily diet.

God's judgments are unconditioned and absolute. Human judgments are conditioned and relative. To take one's judgments to be unconditioned and absolute is to commit an usurpation of God's own greatness. But let us not commit that other, more subtle, kind of usurpation: the kind that results from our forgetting that our very sourcing for God's judgments involves human judgements. God will always be God, and we humans will always be human. Our listening to God, even when it is utterly devoted, and can, therefore, hear God loud-and-clear, will still be our own listening, and as human listening it can never be perfect, and can always improve. One sure way of improving our listening to God is striving to listen to our fellow human beings, especially those who make it their life-long task to listen to God. *And God knows best.*

[First published in *Focus* (vol.15, No.4, 1995) a publication of the Pastoral Institute in Multan, Pakistan, pp.197–204. It was originally presented at the 20th session of Journées Romaines on 6-12 September 1995 in Rome. The theme of the conference was "The Greatness of God as Understood by Christians and Muslims"]



Ibrahim and Islam

IBRAHIM AND ISLAM GO HAND-IN-HAND. Islam is the way of Ibrahim (peace be upon him), and Ibrahim is a prophet of Islam; Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is not the founder of a new religion, but another prophet of Islam chosen by God, and entrusted with God's very speech in order to revitalize the way of Ibrahim. All Muslims after Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) are followers of Muhammad, but Muhammad is a follower of the way of Ibrahim. Therefore, all Muslims after Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) are followers of the way of Ibrahim. God Himself tells Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and his followers to say that they are followers of the way of Ibrahim.

But what is this "way of Ibrahim"? It is the way of utter dedication to the one true God: Allah. The way of Ibrahim is the way of total devotion to Allah. The way of Ibrahim is the way of directing one's whole being and all one's action to God alone. It is the way of not worshiping any thing, or anybody, other than God. It is the way of according of all divinity to God alone. Whoever believes and lives this way is a follower of Ibrahim.

The significance of Ibrahim in Islam is just like the significance of Muhammad in Islam in that it is not the significance of the person himself, but of the object of the person's intentionality and dedication. That object of total and utter devotion is God, and only God, for both Ibrahim and Muhammad. Ibrahim is important for us Muslims in that he points to, and is dedicated to, the only legitimate object of dedication: Allah.

It is true, however, that every pointer to God, every aya of God, is

unique and has its own special characteristics that give it a particular identity or personality. Ibrahim is a unique person. He is a very special person. Muslims have a loving fondness for Ibrahim and for the special place he has among God's many prophets.

Ibrahim is with us, explicitly or implicitly, every time we pray to God in the direction of blessed Ka'ba. We pray to God in the direction of the Ka'ba that was built up by Ibrahim with the help of his son Isma'il. Today we still pray in the direction of the House of God in which Ibrahim himself prayed. In this way, a Muslim stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Ibrahim in common prayer to the one true God: Allah. Thus *salah*, or daily prayer, which is the very pillar of Islam, is an Ibrahimic practice in the direction of a house of God built by Ibrahim. When we stand in prayer to God in the direction of Mecca, we are standing in the same place in which Ibrahim himself stood (his stand or *maqam*). It is significant that every prayer that a Muslim prays is concluded with asking for God's blessing of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his family, just as God blessed Ibrahim and his family (the second part of *tashahhud*).

When we go to God in pilgrimage (hajj), we become fellow pilgrims with Ibrahim. The rituals (*masha'ir*) we perform are the very same ones performed by Ibrahim himself. As Muhammad, the Prophet of God, peace be upon him, says, "We are heirs to the rituals of our father Ibrahim and we strive to perform them as he performed them".

In Mecca, near the Ka'ba, we pray next to or in sight of the place where Ibrahim once stood (his *maqam*). When we stand on mount 'Arafa, we stand where he stood. When we run between Safa and Marwa we run with his wife Hajjar. When we drink from the well of Zamzam, we drink from the well that sprang forth for his son Isma'il. During *hajj* or *umra*, Ibrahim is always with us, and we fellow Muslims, are going together towards God.

The ritual of *hajj* culminates in the ritual sacrifice of sheep in memory of Ibrahim's act of obedience in response to God's testing him by requiring him to sacrifice his own son. The whole Muslim Umma shares in the ritual, and in a single morning from China to America, and from Africa to Europe, the act of faith of Ibrahim is reenacted through the ritual sacrifice of sheep in the feast of sacrifice (*Eid al-adha*) or greater feast (*Eid al-kabir*) of Islam.

Ritually, Ibrahim is most present in the hearts of Muslims in prayer, pilgrimage, and the great feast. However, Ibrahim is present with everyone who dedicates any of his or her acts to God alone, for it is this exclusive dedication to God that is crucial about Ibrahim.

Ibrahim, as God speaks about him in the Qur'an, has been a very rich source of paradigmatic guidance throughout the ages. The personality of Ibrahim in the Qur'an is very rich and complex and its different dimensions have been focused on by different tendencies within the Islamic tradition.

First, there is the Ibrahim of faith about whom we have spoken. We must note however that Ibrahim's utter faith in Allah had a high cost for him because it led to his rejection by his community, including his father, in an age when a man without a community was like, or perhaps worse off, than a dead man. Ibrahim did not give in to the pressure of his father and his community, but abandoned them and directed himself to God alone. This willingness to pay the price of faithfulness to Allah is paradigmatic for all Muslims, especially at times when dedication to God becomes a source of trouble for one's daily life. Ibrahim was willing to enter fire in faithfulness to Allah and God responded by making the fire cool and a comforting peace to his act of pure faith.

Second, there is the Ibrahim of sacrifice, the Ibrahim that was willing to obey God even when the sacrificing of his very son was involved. Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice is uplifting when rights are eagerly sought after but responsibilities and sacrifices shunned.

Third, there is the Ibrahim of prayer who has enough trust in God's compassion and responsiveness to prayer that he leaves his own family in God's hands. The prayers of Ibrahim are still prayed by Muslims and they are amongst the most beautiful prayers in the Qur'an.

Fourth, there is the Ibrahim of the ever-growing faith who asks to see God in order for his heart to be soothed. When a Muslim sees that Ibrahim himself thought that his faith, is in need of further growth and strengthening, he takes heart at his feelings of deficiency in faith.

Fifth, there is the Ibrahim of intimate friendship with God. This Ibrahim, a favorite of Sufis, is the Ibrahim of the proximity to God, or qurb, that has been the goal of all men of faith. Such men strive to imitate Ibrahim in coming to God with a good heart (*qalb salim*) so that

they may enjoy communion with Him. Seeking to become like the Khalil or friend of God is what tassawuf is all about.

Sixth, there is the Ibrahim of inquiry. This has been the favorite of the theologians and the philosophers of Islam, who see Ibrahim's going from observation and contemplation of the passing nature of the sun and planets to God as an indication of the legitimacy of theological and philosophical contemplation.

Seventh, there is the Ibrahim of argumentation, who is willing to hold disputations with unbelievers and who even dares to argue with the angels against the destruction of Lut's city because Lut lived in it.

These dimensions of Ibrahim are by no means exhaustive. There is a sense in which the whole Islamic tradition, insofar as it is dedicated to Allah alone, is nothing but the practice of the way of Ibrahim and the continuous offer to imitate him in his dedication and faithfulness to God. *And God knows best.*



Dialogical Engagement as Vigilant Remembrance (*Dhikr*)

YEARS AGO I had a strange reading experience that taught me a great deal. I was reading the famous *Forty Hadiths* of Imam al-Nawawi. The edition I happened to be reading was a bilingual one. Each Arabic *hadith* occupied a page, while an English translation of it occupied the facing page. At first I only read the Arabic hadiths with the attitude of “Why bother with the translation when you can read the original?” Eventually, however, I did feel curious about the translation, and wanted to check it for accuracy. The experience of comparing the original to the translation proved astonishingly enlightening. Hadiths that were initially utterly obvious and familiar (many of them having been learned by heart in primary and secondary Libyan schools) suddenly yielded many fresh meanings and insights. The English translation, by trying to say what the hadith is saying in a different language associated with different concepts and notions, proved to be quite refreshing. I learned there and then that one’s very familiarity with texts, especially if acquired over many years, can become a barrier between the reader and the text. Familiarity can give rise to a lazy complacent attitude that assumes the achievement of understanding when, in fact, there is only a superficial acquaintance. Reading the hadiths in the language of another gave me a better understanding of the hadiths in the language of my own.

This single reading experience taught me the value of comparative study, and especially of the comparative study of the articulations given by others of their understanding of things with which I am most familiar. Nothing in my life as a Muslim has proven to be more fruitful

for understanding Islam than the comparative study of other religions. Whole areas of the Islamic tradition were closed to me through mundane familiarity, and were only opened up in dazzling flashes of insight when I heard others of other faiths articulate them in their own languages. Christianity is the one religion, other than Islam, that I have studied the most, and that I am still studying. I have found Christianity to be a similar/different *other* with whom the communion of dialogue, the dialectic of question-and-answer, and the struggle of challenge-and-response can productively take place.

By way of brief illustration, I shall enumerate a few dimension of Islam that took on a special significance and luminance through my encounter with Christianity. The importance of “hope” and “anticipation” as emphasized by Christian theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann alerted me to the vital importance of the categories of *waʿd* and *waʿid* (promise and threat) in the Qurʾan, and of the Qurʾanic frequent association of belief in God with belief in the hereafter. The importance of belief in, and anticipation of, the not-yet in Islam became obvious in light of the Christian literature on hope. Christian controversies regarding the relationship between, and the saving powers of, “work” and “grace” alerted me to the importance of the dialectic between human striving and God’s mercy, and to the fine balance between the two in the Qurʾan. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with his distinction between “cheap” and “costly” grace proved most instructive to me as a Muslim. The great theologians of liberation like Gustavo Gutierrez and Juan Luis Segundo, taught me to be on the look out for liberating themes in the Qurʾan, and for Islam’s special message for the *mustadʿafin* (the oppressed). The massive literature on Biblical Hermeneutics, and the astonishing variety of interpretative schools in Christianity taught me the vital importance of Qurʾanic *tafsir* and of *usul al-fiqh*, and made obvious the stagnation from which hermeneutical issues suffer in modern Islam. Recent works on *lectio divina*, or sacred reading pointed out to me the importance of the much-neglected Islamic literature on *adab al-tilawa* (the manners of recitation) and on *akhlaq hamalat al-Qurʾan* (the ethic of bearers of the Qurʾan). There are many other things that I have learned to look at more carefully and with much more reflection and consideration because I saw them clearly elaborated and celebrated in contemporary Christian writings.

It wasn't only Christian writings that made me reflect more deeply on various dimensions of Islam. I must point out the importance of the encounter with Christian living, communities, and institutions. Living in Rome, attending lectures at the Pontifical Gregorian University, visiting St. Anselmo University, and teaching at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), I had ample opportunities to observe the way many dedicated Christians live. While as a Muslim I can not help but be astonished at young men devoting themselves to a life without marriage and children, I cannot but appreciate their dedication and sacrifice. Making friendships with such people helped me understand the dedication of the Muslim scholars, philosophers, and sufis, who built the glorious tradition of Islam. Such dedication needs to be revived and enhanced amongst Muslims so that Islam can contribute yet again to the spiritual nourishment and development of humanity. The incredible organization of Catholic institutions, and of communities such as the Jesuits and White Fathers, made me contemplate Muslim historical institutions such as al-Azhar and al-Zaytuna, and the organization of Sufi brotherhoods in the glory days of Islam. Such experiences alerted me to the importance of institutional as well as communal reforms. Reforming theology is vital, but theologies can have a concrete influence only through communities of dedicated people, and well-organized institutions.

Not all my experiences in encountering Christians have been positive. It is painful to see hypocrisy, rigidity, and deceit no matter who happens to be the practitioner of these human sins. However, it is especially painful to see them come from people who are supposedly men of God. Not all the priests and monks that I have met lived up to their Christian ideals. There were also theologians who proclaimed their own glory, or the glory of their intellects, more than the glory of God. However, even in such encounters with negativity, I learned a great deal. I learned to look at my own faults more carefully, and to constantly check my motivations and deeds measuring them against God's norms rather than human whims. I learned to appreciate fallibilism, and more importantly the incredible human ability to move forward despite our faults. Making errors is quite human. Errors checked for, found, and corrected are great gifts. Errors worshipped are fatal.

Christians and Muslims can learn a great deal from each other. They can challenge each other to live righteously and to actualize through practice the great spiritualities and ethics which they constantly preach.

Let me conclude these rudimentary reflections by suggesting that it is possible, and may He quite fruitful, to view interreligious dialogue under the aspect of the activity of vigilant remembrance or *dhikr*. *Dhikr*, the activity of constantly, diligently, and vigilantly remembering and worshipping Allah, is the single most important task of a Muslim. If our dialogical engagement with others can remind us of God, and can help us to retrieve aspects of our own way to God that we have forgotten (at times through our very familiarity with them, and repetition of them) can't we see this engagement as a form of *dhikr*?

[Published in *Islamochristiana* (Vol.21, 1995), pp.23-25. The paper was originally presented at the last meeting of a Seminary for Theologians, held in Rome on 29 September-1 October 1994 on "La Convivance entre Chrétiens et Musulmans dans les Pays Méditerranéens"]



Doubt and Certitude

The Muslim Tradition

LET US START our consideration with a reflection on the following Qur'anic *ayat*:

And Musa said, "Even if you disbelieve, you, and all the people of the earth with you, Allah is surly self-sufficient and gratitude-worthy".

Have you not heard the news of those who lived before you: the people of Nuh, Aad, and Thamud, and those after them (you do not know them, but Allah knows them). The Messengers sent to them brought them things manifest, but they put their hands on their mouths and said: "We disbelieve that with which you have been sent, and regarding that to which you invite us, we are in an uneasy doubt".

The Messengers sent to them said: "Can there be doubt in Allah? The maker of the heavens and the earths He calls you so as to forgive your sins, and to defer you to a known destiny". They said, "You are but human beings just like us, and you want to hinder us from worshiping what our fathers have worshiped. Bring us, then, an authority manifest".

The Messengers sent to them told them, "Yes, we are but human beings just like you, but Allah gives gifts to whomever servant He wants. It is not up to us to bring you an authority without Allah's permission. Upon Allah believers must depend!" (14:8-11)

From this reported dialogue between the Messengers of Allah and their unbelieving peoples, let us focus on the question: Can there be doubt in Allah?

From the context it is clear that this is a rhetorical question. The meaning conveyed by the question is: there can be no doubt in Allah.

The question also conveys astonishment: it is astonishing that anyone would doubt Allah.

This simple question: “Can there be doubt in Allah?” summarizes in a nutshell Islam’s attitude towards doubt (*shak*), and consequently regarding certitude (*yaqin*) as well. Islam’s attitude consists in seeing doubt as an astonishing denial of the obviously manifest. Certitude (*yaqin*), on the other hand, is seen as the simple and grateful acknowledgement of the obvious manifest truth of Allah.

The word *shak* (doubt) is used fifteen times in the Qur’an (4:157, 10:94, 10:154, 11:62, 11:110, 14:9, 14:10, 27:66, 34:21, 34:54, 38:8, 40:34, 41:45, 42:14, 44:9). In none of these fifteen places is *shak* given a positive connotation. In the Qur’an *shak* is always negative.

The word *yaqin* (certitude), along with its derivatives, on the other hand, is used twenty eight times (13:2, 2:4, 2:118, 5:50, 27:3, 27:82, 30:60, 31:4, 32:24, 45:4, 45:20, 52:36, 27:14, 74:31, 15:99, 27:22, 56:95, 69:51, 74:47, 102:5, 102:7, 4:157, 32:12, 6:75, 26:24, 44:7, 51:20, 45:32). In none of these twenty-eight places is *yaqin* or any of its derivatives given a negative connotation. In the Qur’an, *yaqin* is always positive.

From the places *yaqin* and related words are used in the Qur’an, it is clear that a Muslim is supposed to live in certitude regarding many matters including the following central ones:

- Allah
- Allah’s *ayat* (both worldly and Prophetical *ayat*)
- The Hereafter (*al-akhira*)

In other words, a Muslim must live the whole of religious belief (*iman*) in certitude (*yaqin*).

Al-Hadith

The Qur’anic attitude toward doubt and certitude simply carries over to the Prophet’s hadith. It is sufficient, for our purposes, to cite the following two hadiths:

1. “The best of actions are: a belief (*iman*) in which there is no doubt (*shak*), a striving (*jihad*) in which there is no stinginess, and a hajj in which there is no disobedience.”

2. "I witness that there is no God but Allah, that I am the Messenger of Allah, and that every man who meets Allah with these two [affirmations], without doubting them shall enter heaven." (*Sahih Muslim: Kitab al-Iman*).

It is clear from these two hadiths that, as far as the Prophet is concerned, *iman* (belief) is to be characterized by *yaqin* (certitude), and that *shak* (doubt) is an undesirable blemish that should not be allowed to taint one's belief.

As a matter of fact, the Prophet speaks of doubt as a *waswasa* (inner evil whispering) by the *shaytan* (the devil), who is keen on tempting believers by undermining the very certitude of their belief. The Prophet says that, in response to such devilish whisperings, a Muslim must immediately ask Allah to protect him from the devil, and reaffirm his belief by saying, "I believe". (See, *Sahih Muslim: Kitab al-Iman, Bab al-Waswasa fi al-Iman*).

The Sunni Tradition

In the writings of Sunni Muslim authorities of both theological schools (Maturidi, and Ash'ari), and of all four surviving juridical schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) the Qur'anic and Prophetic positive valuation of *yaqin* and negative valuation of *shak* simply carries over.

There is, however, a post-Prophetic development that is worthy of note: the development of Kalam, a full-fledged dialectical disputation-oriented theology.

Kalam developed out of the realization that, even though taking refuge in Allah from the devil (or simply re-affirming one's belief) may work well for believing Muslims whose *iman* is characterized by *yaqin*, such an approach cannot be used to defend Islam against the attacks of the professional doubters with whom Islam had to increasingly deal.

It should be noted that Kalam's intricate and elaborate arguments for the articles of the Muslim faith do not stem from a positive valuation of doubt. On the contrary, those arguments stem from the desire to defend Islam against doubts (always negatively valued). Even a cursory reading of the introductory sections of al-Maturidi's *Kitab al-Tawhid* or al-Nasafi's *Tafsir al-Addila* would suffice to confirm this.

Prefaces of most traditional Sunni kalam manuals make it quite clear that the main task of Kalam is the confirmation and bolstering

of the basic articles of *iman* (received through testimony or *naql*) by providing support for them through the arguments of reason or *‘aql*. This is why Kalam manuals tend to be mainly defensive. The task was that of strengthening *yaqin* by dismissing *shak*. Examples of this can be readily seen in Ibn Furak’s *Mujarad Maqalat al-Ash‘ari*, al-Ghazali’s *al-Iqtisad fi al-I’tiqad*, and Sanusi’s *Sharh al-Sanussia al-Kubra*.

Mu‘tazili Exception

It should be noted that there were a few Kalam scholars (mainly from the Mu‘tazili school) who did see a positive role for doubt. For such scholars (the most important of whom was al-Allaf), doubt was a necessary pre-requisite for reflection (*nadar*) regarding one’s belief, and since reflection (according to the Mu‘tazila as well as for the Sunni Ash‘ari and Maturidi schools) was a requirement for all able Muslims, its prerequisite (doubt) was also regarded as a requirement. See Ahmed Mahmud Subhi’s *Fi’l al-Kalam* (vol. 1, Al-Mu‘tazila, pp. 203–207). The most systematic Mu‘tazili presentation of this view is al-Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s *Al-Mughni* (vol. 12, Al-Nadar al-Ma’arif).

Even for these Mu‘tazila, however, doubt was never seen as a positive final position. Its role for al-Allaf and his school was that of a heuristic that served as an initiator of reflection. Neither al-Allaf nor his school were content to end up with doubt, they only wanted to start with it and then overcome it.

While the Mu‘tazili position is an interesting exception, its importance should not be over-emphasized. Ever since the defeat of the Mu‘tazili school at the hands of the Maturidi and Ash‘ari schools, the school has had very little influence on Sunni Kalam (even though it did continue to influence Shi‘i and especially Zaidi Kalam). Furthermore, most Sunni Kalam scholars in the received manuals either ignore this Mu‘tazili position, or explicitly dismiss it on Qur’anic or Hadith grounds as advocating a preliminary *kufr* (unbelief) in order to go on to defend *iman* (belief).

Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali, a major Ash‘ari scholar, expressed a sentiment that sounds surprisingly similar to the Mu‘tazili one in a short passage at the very end of his *Mizan al-Amal*. In this passage al-Ghazali basically says that

doubt is the prerequisite for reflection and that reflection is the prerequisite to a solid belief. Scholars (both Muslim and non-Muslim) of a particular mind-set, eager to find an authoritative Muslim advocate of so called “methodical doubt” of the Cartesian kind have again and again seized this short passage and made of it the very light under which al-Ghazali’s massive corpus of writings is to be read. The exaggerated use of this passage (in combination with French rationalist prejudices) led many scholars to read al-Ghazali’s famous *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* as a proto-Cartesian exercise in methodical doubt.

A careful reading of al-Ghazali’s *Al-Munqidh* would readily show that for al-Ghazali doubt was nothing to celebrate or to deliberately cultivate. On the contrary, for al-Ghazali doubt was a sort of sickness into which one inadvertently falls and gets trapped. The only cure for this sickness is the light that Allah casts into the heart. It is this light of certitude that al-Ghazali characterizes positively (consistently with other Sunni scholars) and not doubt. Other works of al-Ghazali, especially his *Iqtisad fi al-I’tiqad* make this very clear.

Some Reflections on Doubt and Certitude

Allah the Exalted says to the “serene soul” (*al-nafs al-mutma’ina*): “come back to your Lord, content, and making [Him] content, enter amongst My servants and enter My heaven”. It is a beautiful thing to have the gift of the “serene soul”, and to thus enjoy the return unto Allah’s compassionate presence. But how is one to achieve this serenity of soul? How is one to have a serene soul?

A typical answer immediately suggests itself: have belief (*iman*), and you shall have serenity of soul. Now, such an answer is misleading in at least two ways: (1) it assumes that believing or not believing is a matter of subjective willful decision, and (2) it assumes that a believer will automatically be serene.

A simple assumption is in wide circulation: “if you truly believe, then your soul is serene”. A logical consequence follows from this assumption, and this consequent, too, is in wide circulation: “if your soul is not serene, then you do not truly believe”.

In matters pertaining to religious belief (*iman*) the following related assumptions are often made:

1. Where there is certitude (*yaqin*), there is serenity of soul.

2. Where there is doubt (i.e., no certitude), there is agitation of soul (*hyra*) (i.e., no serenity).
3. Therefore, wherever there is agitation of soul (*hyra*) (i.e., lack of serenity), there is doubt (i.e., lack of certitude).

The first thing to note is that in Allah's Book we find two important counter-examples to the basic contention of the group of presuppositions listed above:

1. The disciples of 'Isa ibn Mariam, who were definitely believers, asked Allah for a banquet in order for their hearts to have serenity, and Allah granted their request without scolding them, or in anyway shedding doubt on their certitude.
2. Ibrahim himself, asked Allah to show him how He revives the dead, and Allah asks him if he did not believe, and Ibrahim says that he does, but that his heart needs to be given serenity again. Allah did not scold Ibrahim for his request, but granted it and no doubt is shed upon Ibrahim's *iman* or the certitude to this *iman*.

These two counter-examples are very important. They both show that it is natural for a man who is certain in his belief to still seek serenity of heart. It is significant that in both cases what was asked for was a clear concrete manifestation or demonstration of that which was previously believed on authority. In both cases Allah grants this concrete demonstration.

What is often called doubt, and seen as something that is diametrically opposed to belief (or certitude in belief), is something that is quite natural and quite acceptable, even to Allah. Rather than call it doubt, we should perhaps call it thirst for concrete realization of things that are believed on report or authority (or authoritative report).

There is a contemporary philosophical (in Bertrand Russell's works, for example) distinction between "knowledge by description" and "knowledge by acquaintance". Knowing that there is a man in the room next door through being told by someone you trust, compared with knowing that there is a man by actually checking the next room. This distinction may be very useful if we extend it to certitude. We can say that there is a "certitude by description" and a "certitude by

acquaintance". You have the first kind of certitude if you are certain of the truthfulness of the person giving you the testimony. You have the second kind of certitude when you actually concretely experience the object of the certitude.

Now, this sort of the distinction would make sense of the Qur'anic distinction between *'ilm al-yaqin* (knowledge of certitude) and *'ayn al-yaqin* (certitude itself). A person who seeks certitude through acquaintance is not necessarily doubtful of the testimony that was given to him. On the contrary, his very seeking of such a certitude may well be the result of his confidence in the description given to him by the authority that he trusts. If you describe to me a delicious ice cream in the refrigerator, I may very well still go to the refrigerator, not to check on your truthfulness (because I trust you), but precisely because I trust and believe you, and would like to have some of that ice cream.

Thus, when Ibrahim asks Allah to show him how He revives the dead, or when the disciples asked 'Isa to ask Allah for a banquet, they were not doing so because of doubt, but because of certitude. Their certitude was in both cases based on their trust in Allah's teachings. Because of that certitude, they were enticed to ask for the qualitatively different certitude of acquaintance. This in no way implies an avocation of doubt or of a testing of Allah.

The certitude of acquaintance is one that is reached through deep, sustained reflection (with all the risks and pains that come with it). In the past few people had to go through this because of the general trust permeating the community and its youth training institutions. There are only a few al-Ghazalis in our histories (such as for examples al-Muhasibi, Sirhindi).

This reflection is of two kinds: intellectual and spiritual. Both are experiential, but the second is of a more intimate nature. The stages of witnessing are complex: in some of those stages one may feel a great deal of skepticism and even outright devastation of all knowing. This too is often mistaken for a lack of beliefs. This is called *hira* or sometimes *jahala* as distinguished from *jahl*, which is real unknowing. It is a non-knowing that gets mistaken for not-knowing, or even for knowing that X is not the case (see Ahmed Sirhindi's *Letter*, 277). When it comes to certitude through the testimony of others (whom one trusts), the strength of the certitude depends on the extent of trust that one

has for the authoritative teachers of the community (these may or may not include parents, but parents play at least a role in this).

The community in Islam is very important, and until (and if) a man undertakes his own reflection on his iman (belief), a Muslim depends on his trust of his community and of its teachings. Because of Western-style education, this confidence—traditionally taken for granted—is now cracking and under severe pressure, such that the number of people who lose their faith (at least in their hearts), and the number of people who have to reestablish it through the strenuous personal effort is increasing rapidly. Unfortunately, the tools for this reflection are not readily provided, because the tools of the past were designed for a very highly and especially trained group of people within the community. That is to say: people who worked in Kalam in the past have been a very highly trained elite. Now Kalam issues are being dabbled in in non-professional ways by many sincere (but superficial) investigators (some have Western tools but no traditional tools).

Today's scarcity of a highly trained elite in the actual practice of Kalam (rather than the mere repetition of it) is alarming. This leads to people being stuck either with teachings by charlatans or dry repetitions of things not properly understood. Muslim common folk are no longer sheltered from influences destructive to their beliefs (based on a trusting *taqlid*) and their trust is shaken daily by television programmes (which are often translated), radio, magazines, novels, etc.

Now, intellectual certitude has often been sought and achieved through the dialectical arguments of the *mutakallimun*. But the reason many of their arguments worked was because the vase they glued together was only suffering from cracks. In cases where the vase is actually broken, it takes more than the clever intellectual gymnastics of the *mutakallimun* to fix things—it takes (as al-Ghazali observes) the remelting and recasting of the broken object. This means being shattered, scattered, bewildered, depressed, suffering from ups and downs. There may have been men who, through their own efforts, have been able to do the recasting. The way to salvation is not one's own efforts, but the *rahma* of Allah. But this *rahma* is only given when one, being so shattered, comes to fully realize the extent of his helplessness, and his total need for his Maker. At that moment, the help of Allah comes through.

Shak can be foundational or only in matter of detail. Like cracks in a physical structure, the place of the crack and the extent (in magnitude and in depth) are very important. Some cracks would destroy the structures, others are harmless (cosmetic), and others are fairly serious and tend to get worse with time, or at the first encounter with pressure. There are two modes of treating certitude and doubt. The first is purely cognitive: this we may call the *epistemic approach*. The second is experiential: this may be called the *existential approach*.

Iman is a human action. Certitude and doubt are two attitudes that characterize this action. As attitudes these are not of a lasting qualitative nature, but can vary, grow, or diminish in intensity, luminosity, and so on.

When Maturidi theologians say that *iman* does not increase or decrease, they do not deny that it varies in quality, they only deny that it varies in quantity. This is because, for them, an action cannot be in itself more or less, but that which characterizes the action can vary a great deal. *Iman* is like a house. *Yaqin* is like the solidity. *Shak* is like a crack (lack of solidity). In a house with cracks, you can still sleep, but your discomfort (or rather agitation) will increase in proportion to the increase in the number and extent of the cracks. To live in a solid house is a blessing, one sleeps with no sense of unease: this is serenity (*itmi'nan*).

So doubt does not destroy *iman*, it only infects. If the crack infection spreads and engulfs the whole house, then it will crumble. This is why a great deal of daily maintenance of the house has to be conducted. This is the importance of *'ibadat*: they fix and readjust anything that starts to go badly in the house. Those with solid houses enjoy such houses because of continuous vigilance, maintenance, expansion, and even renovation!

People's doubt about religion stems from their overconfidence in man's own capacity to save himself. The way to serve such people is not to assure them that their doubts are part of being religious, but to help them recast that doubt upon what ought to be doubted. When they lose confidence in their false "gods", they may very well go back to The One True God.

Islam: especially in the Qur'an, points out the limitations of human knowing. But this should not be taken as skepticism, since it does not

in anyway deny the possibility of true knowledge, and that is the knowledge that comes from Allah Himself (*wahy*).

Certitude and doubt are both intentional in structure. By this I mean that they are always associated with an object. There can be no empty certitude or empty doubt, but always certitude of something and doubt of something or about something. It is interesting to note that most Qur'anic *ayat* mentioning certitude or doubts have to do with either the *ayat* of Allah or the Hereafter. Having certitude in the *ayat* of Allah and the Hereafter is foundational for a Muslim's certitude in his overall *iman*. *Shak* and *rayb*: these are two Qur'anic words that, while being closely associated, are nevertheless different in meaning. *Rayb* is more like unease. *Shak* is more like doubt. This is why we find the Qur'anic expression: *shakun murib* (an "uneasy doubt"). The manifest cannot be doubted. To doubt the manifest is to deny the obvious, to be stubborn. When the obvious is a gift, doubting amounts to ingratitude (this is precisely what *kufr* is).

No Muslim theologian has expressed this better than Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari in one of his *Hikam*: "How can proofs be used to make Him manifest, when He is the most Manifest of all".



The Muslim's Way to Allah

[The following essay was presented by the author at the *Convegno Interreligioso Monastico* at the Monastery of Bassano Romano, in Italy on 25–28 April, 1996]

ISLAM IS THE UTTER DEDICATION to The One True God: Allah. A Muslim is one who strives (to the utmost of his capacity) to live this utter dedication in each and every one of his acts, and in each and every day of his life.

Allah, the unique object of a Muslim's dedication, is neither a mere abstract notion of divinity, nor a self-enclosed or self-obsessed god (like the god of Aristotle). Allah is the One, living, personal, and caring God.

The relationship between a Muslim and Allah is founded in Allah's compassionate caring (*rahma*). One can even say that this compassionate caring is the most fundamental condition of possibility of the Muslim's relationship with Allah. So, let us start our discourse with this "*rahma*".

The Arabic *rahma* conveys a whole flock of meanings and connotations. This flock, however, can be said to hover around a core of meanings and connotations that would be best conveyed into English as "compassion", "care", "kindness", "gentleness", and "tenderness". Perhaps the best way to characterize the core significations associated with *rahma* is to say that they are roughly the same significations associated with "being motherly" and "motherly care".

This characterization is even justified etymologically in that the root R-H-M also gives rise to *rahm* or the mother's womb. This is why, in Arabic, one's closest relatives or kin are called *dawi al-araham* (literally: those of the wombs), or even, his "*rahm*" (literally: "his womb"!).

A definition of *rahma* that one frequently finds in the classical literature of Islam says that *rahma* is “tenderness of the heart”.

It is from this gentleness of the heart that merciful forgiveness issues forth. It is important to point out that mercifulness is one manifestation of *rahma*, and that *rahma* is at once more fundamental and more comprehensive than “mercy”. I say this because *rahma* and its Arabic derivatives are often automatically translated as “mercy” and its English derivatives.

Now, let us return to *rahma* as the compassionate caring of Allah while maintaining the flock of motherly significations which we have just fostered.

“Allah” is “the name of the divine essence” (*ism al-dhat*), and it is very much the primary name of The One True God. There is another divine name, however, that is considered equivalent in the Qur'an: *al-Rahman*. This name can be translated as “the characteristic practitioner of *rahma* (or compassionate caring)”. Another divine name closely associated with *rahma* is: *al-Rahim*. This second name can be translated as “the one who compassionately cares”. A person who is compassionate and caring about others can be called *rahim*, but only Allah can be called *Rahman*.

Now, because *rahma*, or compassionate caring, is an essential characteristic of Allah, He has been from the very beginning (as a matter of fact, before any beginning, i.e., primordially) utterly caring towards His creatures, and especially towards His human creatures.

Allah's compassionate caring about us humans is manifested in two very important facts of His cosmic order:

- 1) Allah made a primordial commitment to Himself to the effect that His characteristic compassionate caring shall take precedence over all His other characteristics (most importantly that of glorious wrath).
- 2) Allah made a primordial covenant with each and every human (in His primordial will and knowledge) to the effect that: (i) Allah compassionately cares for humans, and (ii) humans totally dedicate themselves to the worship of Allah as their only True God.

Both of these two fundamental commitments (the first being of

Allah to Himself, and the other being between Allah and His human creatures) are directly founded in His compassionately caring character as *al-Rahman*.

Now, from these two fundamental commitments the whole process of divine revelation and the totality of the human dialectical engagement with that divine Revelation issues forth.

First, Allah's compassionate caring is manifested in His very creation. Allah's creation is not a complex order of mere things, but is a complex order of *ayat* or "divine operative signs". The creation is a process of disclosing Allah's all-powerful glory. All the creatures of *ayat* of Allah are intimately related, co-dependent, and Allah-dependant. Furthermore, each and every *aya* of Allah is an operative divine revelation that can lead us back to Allah given that we contemplate it with loving wonder and heartfelt humility.

Allah so cared about us that He in a sense made each and every one of His creaturely *ayat* an authentic guide for us to Him. All of Allah's *ayat* from the stars, to the trees, and to the stones, sing the praises of Allah and speak of Him (we only need to listen!).

But Allah, in his all-encompassing compassionate caring, did not stop there. Allah, in His *rahma*, kept sending to human communities special human *ayat* as Prophets (*anbiyya*) and Messengers (*rusul*). These Prophets and Messengers are human beings whom Allah selected and especially endowed as His very own human envoys to the rest of humanity.

These special human beings function as reminders (*mudhakhirun*) to human beings of that primordial covenant that they made with their Maker. We humans are forgetful, but Allah, in His *rahma* does not abandon us to our forgetfulness. He keeps awakening us from our slumber through His operative efficacious prophetic reminders.

The Prophets and Messengers that Allah has sent are very many. Some of them are mentioned by name in the Qur'an: Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qub, Hud, Musa, 'Isa, and finally Muhammad. Allah says in the Qur'an that there have been other Prophets and Messengers the names of whom He chose not to disclose.

The Prophets and Messengers through utterances and deeds strived to remind people of Allah and of their primordial covenant to worship Him and Him alone. Some of these Prophets and Messengers were in

addition given further expressions of Allah's compassionate caring: Heavenly Books. These books are wisely ordered linguistically *ayat* of Allah.

The final Prophet of Allah is Muhammad, and the final Heavenly Book of Allah is the Qur'an. The life-task of every Muslim is that of following Muhammad and the Qur'an that was sent with him back towards Allah. In the Qur'an, Allah says that Muhammad is a *rahma* (an expression of Allah's compassionate caring) and is *rahim* (himself a man of compassionate caring). Allah also describes the book that He sent to us with Muhammad as "*rahma l-il^c alamin*" (a compassionate caring for everyone).

Now, the life-task of each and every Muslim is nothing but the striving to respond properly to the manifestations of Allah's compassionate care or *rahma*.

In responding to Allah's *rahma*, a Muslim is not left to his own whim or devises, but is guided by Muhammad and the Qur'an (with which he was sent to us) to that "proper way" (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) of responding. This "proper way" or "way of rectitude" is called *al-sharia*. This way of Allah to Allah is a whole way of living that can be analyzed, following the Prophet Muhammad himself, into three elements: (1) *iman* (assent), (2) *islam* (surrendering dedication), (3) *ihsan* (practical awareness of divine presence).

The first aspect of the way, *iman*, has to do with giving sincere heartfelt assent to the reality of Allah, His Books, His angels, His Messengers, and the Hereafter.

The second aspect of the way, *islam*, has to do with the pious and devoted full practice of the ways of worship and beatitude which Allah established for us: ritual prayers (*salat*), almsgiving (*zakat*), fasting (*siyam*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*).

The third aspect of the way, *ihsan*, has to do with living in full awareness of Allah's presence. This aspect consists in the continuous adoration of Allah as if we were seeing Him before us all the time (for even when we do not see Him, He sees us!).

These three aspects, separated in analysis, are inescapable in practice. Each is the foundation of the other. Each is built on the other.

It is also important to point out that living as a Muslim entails living as a Muslim community. The way, in all of its three aspects, is lived

by individual persons in a community and with a community. The Muslim's living on the way to Allah is lived with a community that is living on that way.

The Muslims way of living with Allah is the way of gratitude and thankfulness (*shukr*) towards Allah for each and every manifestation of His compassionate caring. Infidelity is nothing but ingratitude (*kufur*). It is the stubborn refusal to acknowledge and respond to Allah's compassionate caring.

Allah has showered us with his primordial loving care. Islam is the response of His *rahma*. It is a response of utter gratitude, utter love, and the utter following of His ultimate Prophet: Muhammad.



Reading Scripture Together: Towards a Sacred Hermeneutics of Togetherness

[The following address was delivered by the author at the Miller Chapel on 10 March, 2005, at a symposium on “Faith in the Third Millennium: Reading Scripture Together”, held in honor of Dr. Iain Torrance’s inauguration as President of Princeton Theological Seminary.]

In the Name of God, Merciful, Compassionate.

Praise be to God.

Blessings be upon the Messenger of God.

READING, ALONG WITH WRITING, is a fascinating activity that is foundational for our very humanity. The many activities we call “reading” have been studied by so many fields from so many angles. One of the fields fascinated by reading and the associated activities of interpretation and understanding is general hermeneutics. Ever since Schleiermacher’s pioneering work, general hermeneutics has tended to assume that all reading activities (and by association, interpreting/understanding activities) are essentially the same. General hermeneutics is often built on the assumption that it is possible to give a general and universally valid account of what reading/interpreting/understanding basically is. Normative general hermeneutics has even strived to dictate how reading/interpreting/understanding ought to be conducted.

Prior to Schleiermacher’s foundation of general hermeneutics, it was quite common to sustain that the reading/interpreting/understanding of scriptures was a unique activity due to the unique nature of

scriptures as Revelation. In the days before Schleiermacher, *hermeneutica sacra* was often contrasted with *hermeneutica profana*. Schleiermacher started a trend that continues until today, which is quite evident in the works of such different thinkers as E. D. Hirsch and Hans-Georg Gadamer, to see *hermeneutica sacra* only as a special application of a universal general hermeneutics. While I very much respect the quest for a general hermeneutics, I find that the leap to it is often too hasty and too facile. I know of only one recent thinker who has truly attempted to first carefully classify different types of activities that go by the name of reading, interpreting, and understanding, and only then go on to put forth a general hermeneutics. That thinker is Emilio Betti, whose approach was definitively, but unfairly, undermined by Gadamer and his school. General hermeneutics, before hastily generalizing, must carefully study and phenomenologically describe the many activities that go by the names of reading, interpretation, and understanding.

I believe that the activity, or rather the many activities of reading scriptures as scriptures (and a lot depends on which scripture, and who is reading it, and with whom), is of a radically different kind from other activities that go by the same name.

Furthermore, I believe that the activity, or rather many activities of reading scriptures together (and, again, a lot depends on which scripture and with whom) is also radically different from reading scriptures alone (if that was ever possible). Reading scriptures is quite different from reading non-scriptures. Reading together is, in general, again, quite different from reading alone. Reading scriptures, in particular, alone, is yet again quite different from reading scriptures together.

It is this last "reading scriptures together" that is the theme of this occasion of inter-religious togetherness in this esteemed place of togetherness. Reading together is a most fascinating kind of reading, and today, in our cruel and broken world, it becomes a divine imperative for all of us. We urgently need a sacred hermeneutics of togetherness. Such a hermeneutics would set as its main task that of describing how reading scripture together works, and how it can mend and repair our shattered world.

Urgent as the description of reading together is, it is perhaps very difficult, or even impossible, to undertake before each one of us

attempts to explicate what reading scripture is like for him or her. In the short time I have, I will do my best to describe to you what reading my scripture (the Qur'an) is like for me, and then hope to find indicators in that of how I can possibly describe reading scripture together.

Phenomenological description, when it does not make pretentious universalizing leaps, is necessarily personal and quite local. Thus my attempt at a description of reading scripture alone will necessarily be personal. The personal witnessing that I learned from in the papers of my most esteemed teachers who spoke before me encourages me to share with you, as best as I can some of my personal experiences of reading my scripture—the Qur'an—first alone, and then together. My approach is based on the fact that the character (*khuluq*) of our dear Prophet (Allah's peace be upon him) was described by his wife (ʿA'isha, may Allah be pleased with her) as being the Qur'an itself: "His character (*khuluq*) was the Qur'an". Much of my work on understanding the activity of reading the Qur'an has been an attempt to come to terms with this important hadith, which affirms that reading the Qur'an, for a Muslim, ultimately means actively striving to be transformed and "characterized" by it. The great writings of such Muslim sages as al-Ajuri, al-Makki, al-Muhasibi, and al-Ghazali on what they termed "bearing the Qur'an" (*haml al-Qur'an*) have been quite helpful in coming to understand this notion of "reading as being transformed in one's very character."

As a Muslim, I am certain that the Qur'an is the very speech of Allah, and I strive to live the full implications of this certitude. I strive, all the days of my life, to bear the Qur'an in my heart, and to allow it to transform me from the inside so as to become my very character. Following a clear tradition of the Prophet (peace be upon him), I believe that the difference between the Qur'an and mere creaturely books is like the difference between Allah Himself and mere creatures. I approach the Qur'an with the reverence and respect that is ontologically and morally due to the very Speech of the Creator.

I take this Speech (which is the expression of an eternal divine capacity to speak, a speech which was already spoken by Allah to Himself in eternity, and which was from eternity in His divine Knowledge) to be a personal letter addressed especially to me, by my loving and compassionate God, in my present-day circumstances. Through the

Qur'an, I strive to hear my very Creator speak to me personally. I receive the Qur'an as a personal gift from Allah, a gift that is freely given, and that demands of me (precisely because it is so freely given!) a life-long task of thanksgiving and righteousness. I learned from my tradition that the Qur'an in the heart is like the inhabitant of a house who transforms it into a "home" by living in it and maintaining it. I know that without the Qur'an my heart, mind, and body would collapse just as a deserted house eventually degenerates. I know this because my beloved Prophet of Allah told me so, and because I experience the rejuvenation and degeneration first hand as I maintain or neglect my daily recitations. I invite the Qur'an in, to inhabit my heart, and to strive to let it eventually become my very *habitus*.

I do not merely read the Qur'an as I would read intellectually stimulating books. I do not even recite it in the way poetry is recited. I recite it in that very special way called *tilawah*. This *tilawah* is a devotional and ritual activity that can be practiced only after ritual purification has been performed. It is to be practiced while sitting or standing facing the Ka'ba in Mecca. Like ritual prayers, *tilawah* or Qur'anic recitation must be performed with that intentionality and directedness that facing the Ka'ba fosters, and with the prerequisite proper manners (*adab*). I do not recite with my *nous* or *ratio*, but with my heart (*qalb*, *lubb*). My *tilawah* does involve intellection, but my intellection (*'aql*) is an activity of my heart, and not of my calculative mind. My heart is the center of my whole concrete being and includes my corporeality as well as my spirituality. I recite the Qur'an with my center letting its transformative effects flow through my body and soul. I sway with it, bodily and spiritually, and go where the spirit of my Lord takes me.

I respect the sequential order of the Qur'an and recite it in cycles as my forebearers did. I submit my heart to its sequential operations just as a piece of wood submits to the sequence of cutting operations of a lathe. I let my heart be shaped, transformed, and worked into a new heart: a Qur'anic heart. I do not pretend to wield the Qur'an instrumentally in the name of "applying" it to this or that project of mine, but simply yield my heart to it as a divine instrument of guidance and salvation. I do not think of the Qur'an as a deposit of ready-made, off-the-shelf solutions to my problems. I know that Allah has endowed

me with the intelligence and faculties necessary to solve my own problems. However, I do realize that my own solutions can become Qur'anic and divinely blessed if I would only let myself become a Qur'anic being by letting the Qur'an shape my very humanity and character. If I can ever become truly Qur'anic, my activities and solutions will be Qur'anic ones.

I strive to keep my heart-sight on Allah throughout the commotion and flux I see in my outer and inner travels because I see everything as an *aya* (or operative sign) of Allah. The Qur'an, itself a sequence of *ayat* (operative signs), speaks about and illustrates the transformative power of *ayat* on every page. The Qur'an teaches me to see the earth and the heavens as *ayat* of Allah. It teaches me how to see processes in nature as *ayat*. It teaches me to see the Prophets of Allah and the books they are given as *ayat*. It illustrates the operative capacity of Allah's *ayat* by calling the *asa* of Musa (Moses) that becomes a snake, and that opens up the sea an *ayat*. I strive to see the operative signs of my Lord everywhere and to be constantly aware of God's presence. The Qur'an further teaches me that, aside from the outer *ayat* (*ayat* of the horizons) there are also inner *ayat* (*ayat* within persons). The more I manage to bear the Qur'an, the more I become a wonder-struck watcher of the signs of my Lord that operate within and upon my own soul. My appreciation of the *ayat* within me, lead me to wonder about and appreciate the operative *ayat* in the persons around me. I come to see others too as divine signs.

The world, my soul, and all other persons become an ocean with an incredible variety of *ayat*. Seeing variety as a divinely given operative sign in things and persons, I respect it, cherish it, and celebrate it. This seeing increasingly becomes a seeing "with the eye of compassion" (*bi 'ayn al-rahma*). It is a seeing that is the condition of possibility for my reading of scripture together with others. As I read the Qur'an alone, I find out that I am never really alone. As I read, the Prophet of Allah, Muhammad (peace be upon him), and all his testimonies (hadiths) are with me. As I read, my beloved teachers are with me. As I read, scholars and sages from the fourteen hundred years of Muslim living are with me. My family, my friends, my neighbors, and my entire community (umma) are with me. It turns out that my reading alone is really a reading together! As a matter of fact, it turns out

that my reading companions as I read “alone” are not just Muslims. My Calvinist teacher from Guelph is with me. My Catholic teachers from the Gregorian and the Biblical Institute in Rome are with me. My Orthodox teachers from Lebanon are with me. My Jewish teachers from Guelph, and more recently, the members of the Scriptural Reasoning community are with me. My reading companions even include all my teachers of philosophy, engineering, and all the topics that I have learned over my entire life.

A sage once told me, when I complained to him that I was about to leave and would not see him for quite sometime, that space and time have no power over things of the spirit. He said to me that all I needed to do to be with someone in my heart was to love them. He cited our beloved Prophet (peace be upon him) who has taught us that “everyone is with the one he loves”. I learned that if I truly appreciate and love all the people that have ever taught me (formally and informally), they will be together with me as I read the Qur’an “alone”. Allah has given me the gift of a very strange and rich life. In my life, I have been privileged to read scriptures together with others, not only in the above sense, but also in the sense of concretely reading with others. As a teacher I have often read the Qur’an with other Muslims in Malaysia, and in Libya as an occasional attendant of a recitation group that has been meeting every single evening (without fail) since the early fifties. The experience of hearing Allah speak to His community (umma) and of the response of the community to its Lord has been transformative. I have also read the Qur’an with Christians and Jews in Rome as a teacher at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies and as a participant in Scriptural Reasoning meetings. The experience of mutual illumination that comes about through the sharing of scriptures has been nothing short of a divine grace. I have also read the Bible with Muslim students as a teacher in the Islamic College in Libya. The experience of learning more about others and about ourselves through studying their scriptures has been wonderful. I have also read the Bible and the Torah with teachers and friends who truly believed in them as scriptures. The experience and honor of partaking in the transformation that you see in the other as he or she is transformed by his or her scripture has been most illuminating. The experience of spiritual deepening in my own tradition has been humbling.

READING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

I need to reflect more deeply on my experiences of reading alone and reading together in order to even begin to outline the “sacred hermeneutics of togetherness” that I truly believe we should seek to articulate. However, I do believe that there are a few simple things which I have learned over the years that can be offered as a rudimentary contribution towards such a hermeneutics. First, reading scripture is radically different from any other kind of reading. Second, reading scripture demands a sacred hermeneutics that respects the sacred origin and nature of scripture. Third, togetherness is already present in the reading of scripture to the extent that love of God and of others is present in our hearts. And fourth, reading scripture together makes such love in God stronger and makes the togetherness deeper and more lasting. May we emerge from this blessed and concrete togetherness of today with a heartfelt togetherness that can only get stronger and stronger, through love, beyond the limits of time and space.

[Published in *Theology Today*, 2005]

INDEX



- ‘Abdu, Mohammad, 121
- Abdurrahman, Taha, 121
- Abraham. *See* Ibrahim
- abrogation, 110
- al-Afghani, 121
- Agazzi, Evandro, 68
- Akasheh, Msgr. Khaled, 191
- Albo, Joseph, 141
- Alexy II, Patriarch of Russia, 197
- Algeria, 175
- al-Allaf, 251
- Allah
 - compassion of, manifestations of, 259
 - Rahmatology, 126–32
 - remembering as *Al-Rahman*, 124–26
 - See also* God.
- Allam, Magdi
 - baptism of, 173–74, 177
 - conversion of, 165–66
- Amman Message, 187
- animals
 - compassion in, 129
 - compassion towards, 134–35
- anticipation and hope, 245
- apostasy
 - death threats, 166–67
 - fear among converts from Islam, 169–70
- Aquinas, Thomas
 - as opposed to idea of God being above reason, 28, 40
 - on non-contradiction and omnipotence of God, 58–61, 65
 - on principle of non-contradiction, 73–74
 - similarities with Islamic approach, 45–50
- Arab Christians, 18
- Arafa, 241
- Archbishop of Canterbury, 197
- Archbishop of the Chaldean, 195
- Aristotle, 68
 - Gamma of the Metaphysics*, 73
- Arnaldez, R., 5
- arrogance, 223
- Ash‘ari school of theology, 126–27
- Asia vs. Macedonia contrast, 30–31
- Athanasian Creed, 142–44
- attributes of Allah, 126
- Augustine, 61, 81
- authority in Islam, as distributed, 201
- awliya*, 132
- ayat* (operative signs)
 - arrogance as preventing the seeing of, 223
 - contemplation on, 124
 - learning to see things as, 221
 - prophets as, 260
 - seeing the Qur’an as a sequence of, 267

INDEX

- universe as filled with, 131
- ayatology, 132–36
 - as personal approach to Allah, 124
 - in the Qur'an, 135–36
 - and environment, 221
- ʿayn al-yaqin*, 254
- Al-Azhar
 - joint statement with the Vatican, 195
 - endorsement of Common Word, 200
- al-Baqillani, 225
- Barth, Karl, 34
- Bassano Romano, 258
- bearing the Qur'an, 265
- Being
 - as a gift, 222
 - as within the realm of understanding, 74
 - that which is contradictory to the constitution of, 62
- Benedict XVI
 - advisors of, as hostile to Islam, 18, 23
 - attitude towards Islam, 17
 - baptism of Allam, 173–74
 - Common Word, 188
 - encounter with Allam, 167
 - Euro-centric take on Christianity, 33–34
 - exclusion of Islam from *universitas scientiarum*, 21
 - inadequacy of apology of, 24
 - lecture of, 3–12
 - meeting with Mustafa Ceric, 208
 - on the relationship between science and philosophy, 97
 - reason, definition of, 29
 - reliance on Orientalist studies of Islam, 17
 - seeking to undermine opposing theologies, 32
 - significance of papal role of, 15, 16, 35
- Bertone, Cardinal Tarcisio, 193
- Betti, Emilio, 264
- Bible
 - Greek translation of, 6
 - affirmation of sovereignty of will of God in, 54
 - See also* Old Testament; New Testament
- Bin Laden, Osama, 175
- Bismillahi al-Rahman al-Rahim*, 125
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 245
- Bonn, University of, 3, 8, 17
- Bontadini, Gustavo, 70
- books
 - limitations of, 123
 - heavenly. (*See* sacred texts; scripture)
- Bourmans, Maurice, 19
- brokenness before God, 184
- Brookings Institution, 206
- Brown, Sheikh Jihad, 123
- Bukhari, 106
- burning bush, 6
- Bush, George, 208
- calculations, logical, 72
- Cambridge Interfaith Programme, 122
- cartoons of the Prophet, 175–76, 200, 227–32
- Catholic Church
 - as contrasting with Islam, 43
 - idea of God in, 42–43

INDEX

- use of torture and violence in
 - history of, 26
- Catholic magisterium
 - rejection of God acting without
 - reason of, 40
 - view of, on understanding faith, 86
- Catholic News Service, 203–205
- Catholic schools, 171, 178
- Catholic-Muslim Forum, 193–94, 200
- Catholic–Muslim relations, 14. *See also* Christian–Muslim relations
- Catholicism
 - as not containing any
 - contradictory principles, 77
 - as free from pure Fideism, 90
 - key beliefs within, 100–101
- causality, principle of, 97
- Celata, Archbishop Pier Luigi, 156, 191
- Cembrero, Ignacio, 173
- Ceric, Mustafa, 208
- certainty
 - and serenity, 252–53
 - certitude and doubt in the Qur'an, 248–49
 - epistemic and existential
 - approaches, 256
 - in the hadith, 249–50
 - in the Sunni tradition, 250–51
 - of acquaintance, 254
- chain of firstness (*al-musalsal bil-awaliya*), 157
- Chaldean, Archbishop of, 195
- Characteristics of things (beings), 72
- children. *See* youth
- Christian-Muslim relations, 4, 22, 24, 53, 99
- Christianity
 - as being synonymous with
 - Europe, 33
 - as influenced by Greek
 - philosophy, 92
 - benefits of Muslims engaging
 - with, 244–47
 - Christian minorities in Muslim
 - lands, 26
 - contrast tables, use of, 27
 - creed of, 142–44
 - dehellenization of, 8–10
 - demotion of non-European
 - churches, 31
 - elements of, beyond capacity of
 - human reason, 82
 - Hellenistic thought and, 5–8
 - key beliefs within, 100–101
 - reformation of, 8
 - relationship with Islam, 16, 99
- Christians
 - as worshipping the same God as
 - Muslims, 45–46
 - Quranic injunction for interacting
 - with, 44
 - worship of, 139–40
- coherence, within universe of
 - reason, 4, 41
- Collingwood, R. G., 226
- Common discourse between People
 - of the Book, 47
- Common Word, 181–85
 - compassion architecture, 206
 - frequently asked questions about, 186–90
 - initiative with Catholic News
 - Service, 203–205
 - reasoning behind, 186
 - women signatories, 202
- community, disintegration of, 255
- comparative study of other religions,

INDEX

- benefit of, 244–47
- compassion
 - and security, 206–209
 - as active agent of social change, 213
 - hadith of, 157
 - manifestations of, 222–24
- compassion of Allah (*rahma*), 125. *See also Rahma*; Rahmatology
- compassion-centred theology, 126
- Compassionate, the. *See* Rahmatology
- complacency, when reading a familiar text, 244
- conditionality of human judgement, 239
- conflict resolution, 153–54
- consensus, Common Word as, 187
- Constantinople, siege of, 4, 21
- Contra Faustum*, 61
- contrast tables
 - use of among missionaries, 27
 - use of by modern Catholic scholars, 45
- Convegno Interreligioso Monastico, 258
- conversion, forced, 4–5, 22–25
- Corriere della Sera, 170
- covenant, primordial, 259
- craftsmanship of Allah, 131
- Created Being, nature of,
 - dependence as part of, 64
- creation
 - as a disclosure of Allah's glory, 260
 - nature of God's creation, 64
- creaturely *ayat*, 131–32
- creatures, compassion towards, 134–35
- creedal discourse, 181–85
- Crescas, Hasdai ben Abraham, 141
- crippled, way of the, 215
- cruelty
 - as a forsaking Allah's compassion, 130
 - as malignant distortion, 158–59
 - facing, as an imperative for Islamic theology, 121
- Day of Judgement, compassion of Allah on, 129
- dehellenization of Christianity, 8–9, 33
- Denmark, cartoons controversy, 227–32
- Dependence
 - as a characteristic of created beings, 64
 - on God, 75
 - on oneself, 76
- depicting the Prophet, 229. *See also* cartoons.
- Dhikr* (*see also* remembrance)
 - daily discipline of, 130
 - defined, 124
 - interreligious dialogue as, 244–47
- dialogue
 - as condition for theologizing, 122
 - as means of resolving conflict, 154–55
- dies academicus*, 3
- disciples of Jesus, 253
- distortions of Islam, 158–59
- divine attributes, 126. *See also* Rahmatology
- divine judgements, ready-made, 233–37
- Divine wisdom, as unrestricted, 48–49
- dog, story of, 134

INDEX

- Don Bosco Institute, 168
- doubt
 - certitude and doubt in the Qur'an, 248–49
 - epistemic and existential approaches, 256
 - in the hadith, 249–50
 - in the sunni tradition, 250–51
 - role of in Muʿtazili theology, 251
- dualism, rejection of
 - epistemological, 70
- Duns Scotus, 7

- education, proselytizing in schools, 171, 178
- Egypt, secularism in, 168
- Eid
 - celebration of, 156–57
 - Eid al-adha*, 241
 - Vatican's message for, 153–55
- El-Hachem, Archbishop Mouned, 175
- Empiricus, Sextus, 31
- empiricism
 - notion of certainty through, 9
 - as not posing any threat to universal principles of being, 97
- engineers, Islamists as, 226
- environment, Islam and, 219–26
- epistemic approach to certainty and doubt, 256
- error
 - learning from, 246
 - human knowledge as not being free from, 72–73
 - falling into, using philosophy, 82
- Europe, connection with
 - Christianity, 8, 33
- Existence
 - as dependent on God, 75
 - as ultimately dependent on God, 65
 - of only that which is possible, 59–60
 - the question of the essential principles of, 63
- existential approach to certainty and doubt, 256
- Extra- rationality, 51, 53, 76
- extremists, taking Common Word message to, 197

- faith
 - and certainty, 248–50
 - and reason in Islam, 31
 - as one of three elements of Islam, 261
 - as residing in the heart, 25
 - as unable to be expressed by reason alone, 77
 - catholic understanding of, 86
 - contrast of, with philosophy, 81
 - decrease and increase in, 256
 - Greek and biblical understanding of, 5–8
 - harmony of, with reason, 80, 82, 90
 - Islamic understanding of, 25
 - weakness of arguments against, 83
- fallibilism, 246
- falsehood, as contrary to truth, 93
- familiarity, and reading, 244
- al-Farabi, 31
- al-Farahi, 121
- feast of sacrifice (*Eid al-adha*), 241
- Fideism, 77, 86–87
- Fides et Ratio*
 - revelation as above reason, 51

INDEX

- on revelation and reason, 84–85
- on the harmony of revelation and reason, 89–90
- on link between metaphysics and theology, 94–95
- principle of non-contradiction, 41
- Fitzgerald, Michael, 18
- fly, story of, 134
- Ford, David, 192
- forgetfulness, as nature of man, 124–25
- forgiveness, 160–61
- Forty Hadiths of Imam al-Nawawi, 244
- Fourth Lateran Council, 7
- free speech, 228
- Frege, Gottlob, 53, 140
- Freisinger Hochschule, 3

- Gadamer, 264
- general hermeneutics, 263–64
- al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, 31, 222
 - contemplation on signs of Allah, 124
 - on doubt, 251–52
 - on names of Allah, 126
 - on the compassionate attitude of the believer, 231
- globalization, 210
- God
 - abuse of power in the name of, 233–37
 - acting unreasonably, as contradicting nature of, 5–6, 27–28
 - all beings as dependent on, 75
 - and idea of non-contradiction, 42
 - as freely self-committing, 28
 - as totally self sufficient, 64
 - as uncontainable, 140
 - Catholic idea of goodness of, 42–43
 - Christian concept of, 6, 12
 - Christian creed, 142–44
 - Christians and Muslims as serving the same, 53
 - compassion of, 39
 - Judaic creed, 142–44
 - knowledge as provided by, 83
 - love of, 7
 - Muslims and Christians as serving the same, 45–46
 - omnipotence of, 48–50, 57–58
 - oneness of, 79
 - power of, in relation to the possible and impossible, 59–60, 63
 - sovereignty of will of, 54, 65
 - transcendence of, 7
 - voluntarist theologies of, 7
 - will of, as superior to reason, 52–53
 - wisdom of, as transcending worldly wisdom, 50, 87
 - worship of, 139
- Goodness of God, Catholic idea of, 42
- Gomaa, Sheikh Ali, 200
- Gospel
 - of John, 29–30
 - use of term logos in, 5–6
- grace, 245
- gratitude to Allah, expressing, 125, 224
- Greek thought
 - influence on Biblical concepts, 91
 - rapprochement with Biblical faith, 6–8
- Guixot, Father Miguel Ayuso, 191
- Gutierrez, Gustavo, 245

INDEX

- hadith
 - authentication of, 106–107
 - certitude and doubt in, 249–50
 - compassion in, 129
 - of compassion, 157
- haml al-Qur'an*, 265
- Hanbali, 31
- Harnack, Adolf von, 8–9, 34
- healing the wounds of war, 195
- heart (*qalb*)
 - as focal point in ayatology, 133
 - as abode of faith, 25
 - effect of the Qur'an on, 266
 - of the believer, 213
- Heavenly Books, 132. *See also* sacred texts
- Hegel, 31
- Hellenistic thought
 - harmonization of, with Christianity, 33
 - rapprochement with Biblical faith, 6–7
 - synthesis with biblical faith, 32
- hermeneutics, 263–64
- Hirsch, E. D., 264
- holy books, taking God's judgements from, 238–39
- holy war, 4–5, 22
- hope and anticipation, 245
- humility, as precondition for seeing ayat, 223
- Husserl, 133, 220

- Ibn Abd al-Salam, al-ʿIzz, 126
- Ibn al-ʿArabi, 127, 223, 225
- Ibn ʿAshur, 121
- Ibn Hazm, 5, 7, 27–28, 39
- Ibn Saʿd, 107
- Ibn Sina, 31
- Ibn Taymīya, 31

- Ibrahim, 240–43
 - and certainty, 253
- idealism, in youth, 214
- Identity, as linked to the Principle of non-contradiction, 76
- ihsan*, 261. *See also* Sufism.
- Ijmaʿ* of the Umma
 - as basis of Islamic theology, 123
 - Common Word as, 187
- Ikhwan al-Safa, 31
- ʿilm. *See* knowledge
- ʿilm al-kalam. *See* kalam; Islamic theology; theology
- ʿilm al-yaqīn, 254
- Iman*. *See* faith
- impossible, the, 61–62
- Independence, 64, 76
- ingratitude, and disbelief, 262
- Inquisition, the, 25
- institutions, dialogue through, 204
- insults, Islamic view on, 230
- Intelligence, limitation of, 79
- Inter-faith dialogue
 - importance of, 20, 35
 - method of undertaking, 54
 - spiritual benefits of, 244–47
- Iqbal, 121
- ʿIsa ibn Maryam, 253
- al-Iskandari, Ibn ʿAtaʾ Allah, 124, 222, 257
- islah* (mending), 220
- Islam
 - and Judaic theology, 141–42
 - as devotional aspects of religion, 261
 - as more than civilization, 204
 - as spread through discussion, not violence, 25
 - as way of Ibrahim, 240–43

INDEX

- distributed authority in, 201
- fear of. (*See* Islamophobia)
- futility of attacks on, 35
- malignant mutations of, 158–59
- no compulsion in religion, 22–25
- portrayal of as non rational, 33
- rationality in, 27–28
- relationship with Christianity, 16
- religious freedom in, 159–60
- spread of, 25
- understanding through other religions, 244–47
- unity in, 198–99
- Islamic theology
 - Ash‘ari and Maturidi schools, 126–27
 - decline of, 219
 - fresh articulations of, 121
 - influence of scientism, 223
 - wholesome word principle, 123
 - See also* kalam
- Islamism and engineering, 226
- Islamochristiana, 200
- Islamophobia
 - baptism of Allam, 174
 - cartoons of the Prophet, 175–76
 - in Orientalist thought, 18
 - views of Benedict XVI’s advisors, 19
- Isra’iliyyat*, 110
- Italy, Muslim community in, 199–200
- Jesuits, 26, 246
- Jesus
 - certitude in disciples of, 253
 - Christian beliefs about, 143–44
 - Muslim beliefs about, 144–45
- Jews
 - as worshipping the same God as Muslims, 141
 - meeting with, 198
 - worship of, 139–40
- al-Jifri, Sheikh Ali, 123, 192, 199
- al-Jisr, 121
- John Paul II
 - Fides et Ratio*, 41
 - on Muslims and Christians serving the same God, 46–47
 - on reason and revelation, 87–88
- John, Gospel of, 5–6, 29–30
- Jordan, 187
- Judaism, creed of, 141–42
- judging others in the name of God, 233–37
- al-Juwayni, 222
- Jyllands-Posten* newspaper, 227–32. *See also* cartoons.
- Ka‘ba, 241
- kalam, 20
 - development of science of, 250–51
 - dabbling of non-specialists in, 255
 - See also* theology
- Kalin, Dr Ibrahim, 191
- Kant, 8–9
- al-Kawthary, 121
- Khaled, Amr, 208
- Khodr, George, 18
- Khoury, Theodore, 4, 5, 21, 107
- Kitab al Tabaqat, 107
- knowledge
 - by description and by acquaintance, 253
 - human, as not infallible, 72–73
 - Islam as religion of, 223
 - natural, as not conflicting with revelation, 83

INDEX

- of things as they seem not as they are, 69
- religion as a source of, 12
- traditional understanding of, 223
- Krim, Mustapha, 174
- kufra*, as ingratitude, 262
- la ilaha illa Allah*, 126
- Lagarde, Michel, 19
- laziness, when reading a familiar text, 244
- Leibniz, 133, 220
- Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 15
- Libya, 26, 211, 220
- Logic
 - as incapable of comprehending God, 55, 79
 - calculations, 72
 - idea of, within Catholic Church, 50
 - in relation to the formulation of principles, 68
- Logos
 - as God Himself in Christian thought, 6–7, 93, 98
 - not acting in accordance with, 12, 43
 - synthesis of Greek and Christian, 33
 - in relation to love and reason, 32
 - rejection of worship of, by Muslim theologians, 55
 - meaning of, as not being a Hellenistic concept, 91
- love
 - and catholic idea of God, 43, 93
 - as transcending reason, 32
 - being with those one loves, 268
 - of God, 7
 - togetherness of, 123
- Lut (prophet), 243
- lutf* (grace), 225
- Macedonia, 30–31
- al-Madani, 121
- Madigan, Professor Dan, 193
- Magister, Sandro, 112
- Maimonides, 141–42
- Malik, Imam, 223
- al-Maliki, Sheikh al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Alawi, 157
- man, as capable of forgetting, 124–25
- Manai'i, Aisha, 202
- Martinetti, 45, 98
- Marwa, 241
- mathematics, notion of certainty through, 9
- Mattson, Ingrid, 202
- Maturidi school of theology, 126–27
- Mecca, 241
- media
 - focus on extremism, 197
 - fixation with atrocities, 210
- meditation of Allah's compassion, 130
- meekness, 184
- Meinong, 50, 148
- mercy, *rahma* as more comprehensive, 259. *See also* Rahmatology
- Messengers, 132
- Metaphysics
 - and theology, 94–95
 - Aristotle's Gamma of, 73
- Michel, Professor Thomas, 19, 193
- Middle East, population growth in, 212–13
- Milan, Catholic University of, 70

INDEX

- Miller Chapel, 263
 Miqdam, Master, 135
 Miracles, 75
 mirror, believer as, 159
 missionaries, 26
mizan (balance), 220
 Modernist Muslims, as diverting
 from prophetic tradition,
 109–110
 Moltmann, Jürgen, 245
 monadology, 132, 220
 mosquito, story of, 134, 135
 Mu‘tazili school, role of doubt in,
 251
 murder, 129
 Musa, staff of, 135
 Muslim–Christian relations. *See*
 Christian–Muslim relations
 Muslim collection of hadith, 106
 Muslims
 as followers of Ibrahim, 240–43
 as worshipping the same God as
 Christians, 45–46
 engaging with Christianity,
 benefits of, 244–47
 possibility of co-operation with
 Christians against secularism,
 55
 worship of, 139–40
al-Munqid min al-Dalal, 252
al-musalsal bil awaliya (chain of
 firstness), 157
 Mutahari, 121
al-nafs al-mutma‘ina, 252–53
 Nakhoda, Sohail, 191, 202
 names of Allah, 126–27
 nature
 as attesting to faith, 82–83
 as ayat of Allah, 131
 as subject to will of God, 48
 Nawawi, Imam, 244
 New Kalam, 121
 New Testament
 Greek influence on, 10
 Hellenistic influence, 10
 ninety-nine names of Allah, 126
 no-compulsion verse, 22–25
 non-contradiction. *See* principle of
 non-contradiction
Nostra Aetate, 46, 99, 200–201
 Nu‘mani, 121
 al-Nursi, 121

 Obama, Barack, 206–208
 Objects, Theory of, 148
 Old Testament, Greek translation
 of, 6, 32
 Omnipotence, 59, 63
 Ontology, 133
 as linked with logic, 68
 operative signs of Allah (*ayat*), 124,
 131
 Opposites, simultaneous coexistence
 of, 63
 Order, as not restricting the will of
 God, 49
 Orientalism
 Islamophobia in, 18
 reliance of Benedict XVI on, 17
 Origen, 82

 Pagani, Paolo, 72
 Paleologus Manuel II, 4, 7, 12, 21
 Pallavicini, Sheikh Yahya, 191, 199
 pan-Islamism, 168
 Paradox of Omnipotence, 50
 Pascal, 8
 Pascal, 55
 Paul, St.
 on love and knowledge, 7

INDEX

- vision of, 6
- peace, importance of Christian-Muslim dialogue, 20
- People of the Book
 - Muslims tolerance towards, 23
 - method of interacting with, 44
- Petitio Principii*, 72
- Petraeus, David, 206–207
- phenomenology, 133, 220
- Philo of Alexandria, 31
- Philosophy
 - as misunderstood by science, 97
 - as related to the universal principles of being, 96
 - classical, 73, 92
 - contrast of, with faith, 81
 - Greek, abstract, 91–92
 - incorrect use of, 82
 - modern, contemporary, 69
 - permissibility of, catholic view, 80
 - uses of, to complement faith, 81
- pictures of the Prophet, 229. *See also* cartoons.
- Pinker, Steven, 211
- Platonism, 9
- PNC. *See* principle of non-contradiction.
- political prisoners, 195
- political stability, 211
- pollution, 220
- Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 18, 153
- Pontifical Gregorian University, 246
- Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), 193, 200, 246, 26
- Popper, Karl, 16
- population of Muslim world, 212–13
- Possible, the, 59–63
- poverty
 - exalting the poor, 212
 - before God, 184, 216
- preaching, 126–27
- primordial covenant, 259
- Princeton Theological Seminary, 263
- Principle of Causality, 72
- Principle of non-contradiction
 - and God, 42, 57–58
 - and idea of miracles conforming to, 75
 - and the question of the impossible, 62
 - as not being a guarantee against error, 72–73
 - as rationally knowable and applicable, 41
 - idea that it is impossible to violate, 71, 84, 98
 - logical and ontological, 66–67, 73
 - matters which violate, 59
 - question of denying, 69
 - undermining, 72
- prisoners of war, 195
- Prophet Muhammad
 - as *Al-Rahim*, 128
 - as final prophet, 261
 - cartoons of, 175–76, 200, 227–32
 - character of, as the Qur'an, 265
 - role of as a reminder, 132
 - status of in the Muslim psyche, 230–31
- prophets
 - as compassion, 128
 - as human *ayat*, 260
 - function of, 132
 - taking God's judgements from, 238

INDEX

proselytizing in Muslim countries,
169–70

qalb. See heart

qibla, unity in, 198

Qur'an

as the character of Prophet
Muhammad, 265

ayatology in, 135–36

certitude in Allah, 248–49

compassion in, 129

critical study of, 110

effect of on the heart, 266

forgiveness in, 161

on creedal discourse, 182

on dealing with People of the

Book, 44, 47

on holy war, 4–5

on humility and gratitude,
necessity of to see ayat, 223–24

on Jesus, 145

on Prophets as reminders, 132

parable of theological discourse
in, 123

prophets mentioned in, 260

reading, 265–68

regarding Jesus, 52

religious freedom in, 159–60

waʿd and *waʿid* (promise and
threat), 245

al-Rahim (Divine Name), 259

rahma (compassion) of Allah, 125

definitions of, 258–59

See also Rahmatology

al-Rahman (Divine Name), 124–26,
259

Rahmatology, 126–32

and environment, 219–26

compassion as agent for social

change, 213

manifestations of compassion,
222–24

salvation through *rahma*, 255

Ramadan, Vatican's message for end
of, 153–55

Rationalism, 86–88

rationality

as dependent on individual
opinion, 53

cannot demonstrate articles of
faith through, 77–79

in relation to God, 55

Ratzinger. See Benedict XVI

al-Razi, 222

reading

and familiarity, 244

of scriptures, 263–69

reason

ambiguity of, 29

and faith in Islam, 31

and revelation, 89–90

and the oneness of God, 79

and universal principles of being,
41, 96

as a gift from God, 27

as confirming faith, 82

as insufficient for comprehending
divine matters, 47–51, 58, 77,
80

as not being above God, 39

as not conflicting with revelation,
87–88

capacity of human, 79

Catholic position on, 40

correct exercise of, in harmony
with revelation, 85

harmonization of, with faith, 31

incorrect use of, 81

John Paul II's comments on, 41

INDEX

- reduction of radius of, 10
- scientific, 11, 16
- self-limitation of, 9
- universe of, 3–4
- will of God not limited by, 52–53
- reciprocity, 175
- reciting the Qur'an, 265–68
- Rector Magnificent, 3, 11
- reductionism of scientific thought, 10
- reflection
 - doubt as a prerequisite of, 251–52
 - intellection and spiritual, 254
- Reformation, 8
- Regensburg, 195
- religion
 - as a source of knowledge, 12
 - no compulsion in, 22–23, 25
 - responsibility of leaders of, 16, 35
- religious authority, 233–37
- religious freedom, 153, 196
 - in the Qur'an, 159–60
- religious symbols, insulting, 195
- Remembrance
 - formulae for, 125–26
 - of Allah's compassion, 133–34
- Rahmatology, 126–32
- relation to forgetfulness, 124–25
- role of Prophets as reminders, 132
- significance of, in Islam, 124
- Renault, Etienne, 19
- Revelation
 - as essential for teaching the truth
 - of divine matters, 47–48
 - as not conflicting with reason, 84–85, 87–88
 - as said to be in agreement with
 - natural knowledge, 83
 - as surpassing reason, 84
 - in *Fides et Ratio*, 51
 - surpassing reason, 77
- al-Rifa'i, Abduljabbar, 121
- al-Rifa'i, Ahmed, 134–35
 - as following the way of the
 - crippled, 215
 - on meekness and brokenness, 184
 - on the greatest secret of Allah, 125
 - on the ways to the Lord, 139
- RISSC (Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center), 187
- Rome Mosque, 199
- Rome press conference, 191–202
- Royal Aal Al-Bayt Academy, 187
- Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center (RISSC), 187
- Russell, Bertrand, 253
- Sabah, Michel, 18
- Sabri, Mustafa, 121
- sacred texts
 - as *ayat*, 132
 - abrogation, 110
 - reading, 265–68
 - taking God's judgements from, 238–39
- sacrifice of Ibrahim, 242
- al-Sadr, 121
- Sadra, Mulla, 222
- Safa, 241
- saints, as *ayat* of Allah, 132
- Salesians of the Don Bosco Institute, 168
- Samir, Khalil Samir, 17–18
- sanad* (lineage of scholarship), 123
- al-Sanusi, Muhammad ibn Yusuf, 126, 139
- Saudi Arabia, 175
- Schleiermacher, 263–64
- scholars, Catholic, 17, 19

INDEX

- scholarship, lineage of (*sanad*), 123
- schools, proselytizing in, 171, 178
- science
- as not nullifying principle of causality, 97
 - notion of certainty through, 9
- scientistic theology, 223
- Scotus, Duns, 7
- Scriptural Reasoning endeavour, 122
- Scripture
- reading, 265–68
 - taking God's judgements from, 238–39
- Scutum Fidei, 145–47
- Second Vatican Council, 46
- secularism, 231–32
- Christian and Muslim co-operation against, 55
- security and compassion, 206–209
- Seerah*. *See* *sira*
- Segundo, Juan Luis, 245
- self-contradiction, 69–70
- self-righteousness, 233–37
- senses, 79
- Septuagint, 6, 32. *See also* Old Testament
- serene soul, 252–53
- Shabastari, 121
- shak* (doubt), 249–51. *See also* certainty.
- Shelasha-asr Ikkarim, 141–42
- Shi'i Islam, 107
- shukr*, 125, 224
- sifat* (attributes) of Allah, 126–27
- signs, 220–22
- similes, in judgement in God's name, 236–37
- Sira*, 107
- Sirhindi, Ahmed, 254
- Socrates, 6, 12
- sola scriptura*, 8
- Sosein*, 148
- Speech of Allah, 265
- spiritual health, 211
- St. Anselmo University, 246
- Sufism
- and Ibrahim's proximity to God, 242
 - theologies of names, 127
- Summa Theologiae*, 58, 60
- Sunna
- as basis of Islamic theology, 123
 - importance of, in Islam, 105
- systematic theology, 20
- Tabah Foundation, 123, 192, 199
- Tabataba'i, 121
- al-Taftazani, 222
- Tauran, Jean-Louis Cardinal, 153–56, 191, 204–205
- al-Tayyib, Dr Ahmed, 200
- theological discourse, parable of in the Qur'an, 123
- theology
- and metaphysics, 94–95
 - and modern science, 10–11
 - as misunderstood by science, 97
 - catholic, as disparate from outright Fideism, 90
 - catholic, discussion of the omnipotence of God, 98
 - Christian, as influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, 91–92
 - Hellenistic thought and Biblical faith, 5–8
 - importance of study of in universities, 11
 - Islamic classical, 50
 - Islamic systematic, 20

INDEX

- scientific nature of, 9
- Theory of Objects, 148
- thought
 - principles of human, 70–71
 - as requiring an ontological reference, 69
- tilawah*, 266
- togetherness of love, 123
- tolerance, towards people of the book, 23
- Torah, 30, 110, 142
- Torrance, Iain, 263
- torture and forced conversion, 25–26
- tradition, importance of, in Islam, 106
- training in compassionate dialogue, 207
- translations, benefit of, 244
- transmission, institutions of, 158
- Trinity, 144–47
 - as a contradiction, 50
 - as not being a contradictory concept, 77
 - as not known through normal reasoning, 78, 83–84
- Troll, Father Christian W., 17–18, 191, 198
- truth
 - as contrary to falsehood, 93
 - as specific to personal experience, 92
 - being as manifesting itself in, 74
 - distinction from falsehood, 82
 - in relation to ontological references, 68
- Turkey, 26
- al-Turki, Sidi Rajab, 214–15
- U.S.-Islamic World Forum, 206
- Umm Ubaida, 134
- Understanding
 - of human intelligence, 79
 - question of the depth of human, 70
 - truth as found through, 74
- unemployment, 213
- unknown, the, 73
- unity in Islam, 198–99
- universe of reason, 3–4
- universitas scientiarum*, 3–4, 20–21
- universities, importance of study of theology in, 11
- variety in *ayat*, 136
- Vatican
 - joint statement with al-Azhar, 195
 - message for end of Ramadan, 153–55
- Vatican Council I, 42
- Vatican II. *See* Second Vatican Council
- verbal attacks, Islamic view on, 230
- Veritatis Splendor*, 87
- violence
 - forced conversion, 4–5, 22–26
 - involvement of the Catholic Church in, 26
 - use of by Catholic Church, 26
 - as incapable of resolving conflict, 153–54
- voluntarism, incompatibility of with Catholic faith, 40
- voluntas ordinata*, 7
- wa'd* and *wa'id* (promise and threat), 245
- war, healing wounds of, 195

INDEX

- White Fathers, 246
wholesome word, theological
 discussion as, 123
Winter, Timothy, 191
women signatories to the Common
 Word, 202
Wooden, Cindy, 203–205
worship of the one true God, 139,
 141
wujud (being), 222

Yale Consultation, 139, 147–48
Yale University, 207

yaqin. *See* certainty
Yaqub, Master, 134
youth
 engaging with, 211–12
 idealism in, 214
 spiritual institutions for, 157–58

Zahrism, 108
Zakaria, Farid, 210–12
Zamzam, well of, 241

This volume brings together the writings of Dr. Aref Ali Nayed, one of the Muslim world's leading theologians, tracing his engagement and dialogue with the Catholic Church and with Catholic scholarship. He lived for many years in Rome, where he studied Catholic theology and taught Islamic theology. For the last two decades, he has been one of the most articulate Muslim interlocutors with the Catholic tradition and a leading Muslim exponent of contemporary interfaith dialogue. This volume includes his famous critique of Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg lecture and the subsequent debate and engagement with Catholic scholars on a range of theological and inter-faith issues. Dr. Nayed's writings are characterized by a profound respect for all people of faith along with a deep reverence for his own faith and the rich scholarly traditions of Islam and reflect an acute awareness of the modern world and its intellectual currents.

Vol. I



AREF ALI NAYED is Founder and Chairman of Kalam Research & Media (KRM). He has lectured on Islamic Theology, Logic, and Spirituality at the restored Uthman Pasha Madrasa in Tripoli, Libya, and was former Professor at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (Rome); the International Institute for Islamic Thought and Civilization (Malaysia), and Visiting Professor at Fatih Sultan Mehmet University in Istanbul. His works include *Operational Hermeneutics: Interpretation as the Engagement of Operational Artifacts* (2011); *The Author's Intention* (co-authored with Jeff Mitscherling and Tanya Ditommaso, 2004); *Growing Ecologies of Peace, Compassion and Blessing: A Muslim Response to 'A Muscat Manifesto'* (KRM, 2010), and essays and monographs on theology, inter-faith, philosophy, spirituality, and politics.



كلام البحوث والإعلام
KALAM RESEARCH & MEDIA

Theology/Inter-faith/Islamic Studies



9 789948 446743