

QUESTIONS MUSLIMS ASK CATHOLICS**AN EXPERIMENT IN DIALOGUE**

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I. QUESTIONS MUSLIMS ASK CATHOLICS
by a Tunis Study Group

In this paper are to be found the reflections of a study group living in a Muslim country (Tunisia). They deal with questions frequently put to them. The topics discussed by the Group are:

1. The Prophethood of Muhammad
2. Consecrated Celibacy
3. God, One and Three
4. The Reasons for our Presence as Christians among Muslims
5. The Eucharist
6. The Divinity of Jesus and the Incarnation
7. Original Sin, the Cross, Redemption
8. The Scriptures and the Word of God
9. Spiritual and Temporal Realities

The method used by this particular group, and the answers they suggest, may be very good, but they should not be considered as universally valid or exhaustive. They are offered here in the hope that they will help

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others in their own effort to find adequate answers to the questions put to them.

The Tunis Study Group lays great emphasis on the intellectual content of both the questions and the answers. Another group living in West Africa has treated the same subject with a slightly different approach. They do pay attention to the meaning of the questions but they try to discern in each person asking this type of question "why" he is asking it. Their answers aim at leading both the one who asks and the one who answers one step further in their own personal search for God.

Introduction

1. The Spirit In Which We Work

We do not consider it to be the central purpose of our presence in Tunis to deal with the questions we discuss here. But since these questions are constantly put to us, we have to try to give a loyal answer, without evasions and ulterior motives. (We always presuppose that the questions are put to us in a spirit of sincerity and friendship, or maybe out of mere curiosity; in any case, not in order to indulge in polemics or to set traps in a spirit of malevolence.) In this context there is no question of announcing the Christian truths (this belongs to the kerygma proper). Even less can it be our aim in this context to try to "convince" whoever he may be. Our aim here is simply to remove ambiguities and certain obstacles to a true dialogue by reducing the caricatures and the false or badly stated differences and distinctions in order to bring out the true and real ones. To achieve this we hold it to be essential not to remain inside the *categories* of Christian theology, nor to stick to the *cultural expression* of dogmas. We must try rather to translate Christian thought, starting from Muslim categories and their expression in Arabic, or in any other important Islamic language, saturated as these languages are with Muslim experience and thought. Only if these conditions are met, will whatever we have to say cease to be of a 'hermetic' character and become "significant" for our partner in dialogue.

2. The Range Of The Questions Put To Us

As a first step we have dealt with questions about:

-Dogmas: the Trinity; the Incarnation (divinity of Jesus); Original Sin — Redemption — Crucifixion — the Meaning of Suffering; the

Eucharist and the Sacraments; Revelation — Inspiration; the Authenticity of the Scripture; the Prophethood of Muhammad and the Inspiration of the Qur'ân.

-Christian life: religious vocation and consecrated celibacy; prayer — Mass — Liturgy.

-The reasons for our presence: why we have left our country; our relationship with our relatives at home; why we learn Arabic (Urdu, Persian). Why do we go out to love "strangers" such as those who put these questions.....?

3. The Method We Followed

-We produced a first draft, comprising the question asked, the underlying mentality, the answer of contemporary Christian theology, its objective application to the specific question asked, and *concrete* ways of answering this question.

-This first draft was then submitted to as many people as possible, including, naturally, Muslim friends, who gave their views as to improving our approach. Finally, a more complete text was drawn up and distributed. Arabic texts have also been prepared.

1. THE PROPHETHOOD OF MUHAMMAD

QUESTION: Islam recognizes all the prophets without making a distinction between them (cf. Q. 2,136,285; 3,84), including Jesus. Do you Christians on your part recognize all the prophets, including Muhammad?

1. The Mentality Underlying The Question

-The Muslim and, more specifically, the Qur'ânic notion of prophethood. The Qur'ân enumerates a certain number of prophets. Jesus belongs to them and ranks among the greatest of them. The line of the prophets culminates and reaches its final point in Muhammad, "the Seal of the prophets" (Q. 30,40). The Qur'ânic revelation is the criterion of truth in religious matters.

-A feeling of injustice and inequality which makes dialogue impossible.

-More deeply, perhaps, the feeling that to deny to Muhammad, the transmitter of the Qur'ân, the qualification of "prophet" is to deny any value to the religious, spiritual and mystical tradition of Islam, and especially to the actual religious life of Muslims, including our partner in dialogue.

-An insult towards a person whom one has learned to venerate and to love from childhood onwards, and who seems to be treated as an impostor. A feeling reinforced at times by a more or less diffuse knowledge of the negative or insulting judgments carried by Christian tradition.

2. Christian (Mainly Catholic) Theology About Prophethood

a) The Line of "Classical" Theology

The prophetic charism is above all the one which arises in the biblical tradition, Old and New Testaments, which culminates in Christ, Incarnate Word of God and the Prophet *par excellence*, which continues in the Church, prophetic until the end of time, not only in the acts of the Magisterium but in the Christian people, in so far as the movements of the Holy Spirit are recognized by the Magisterium.

But the Spirit of prophethood can manifest itself also outside the limits of the Church. This was already the case with the "holy pagans" of the Old Testament (Melchisedech, Job, the queen of Sheba...). St Justin (2nd cent.) recognized an inspiration (*logos spermatikos*) in certain philosophers and pagan diviners. More recently, Vatican II, in the wake of the teaching of Pius XII, officially recognized a movement of the Spirit at the origin of the ecumenical movement, which was born on Protestant soil (cf. Decree on Ecumenism, 1), and of the "religious initiatives" of non-Christians (*Ad Gentes*, n.3). Paul VI declared on his return from the Eucharistic Congress in Bombay (8 December, 1964), quoting St Augustine (*Contra Faustum*, 19,2), that "there is no doubt that the pagans, too, have their prophets" (*Documentation Catholique* 1965, col. 23) — even if we have here a misinterpretation of the thought of St Augustine. (The passage in question was omitted in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.).

In this line, one recognizes the possibility of true prophetic missions outside the Church, but only by way of analogy (the point of reference being prophethood in the Church), only partially (concerning the element of truth preached by those "inspired ones"), and only with the following criterion of discernment: conformity — or at least non-contradiction — with Christian doctrine.

b) The Line of the "New Theology of Non-Christian Religions"

See Rahner, Schlette, Thils, etc.¹ Instead of the "ecclesiocentric" vision of the preceding line, a new vision of the divine design of salvation, of the role of religions, and therefore of the charism of their respective founders, is still being elaborated. (It began some 25 years ago.)

Even if this line has not yet been adopted by the Magisterium, we have to take it into account as one of the trends of actual, present-day research. This line of reflection considers that the "general," "universal," "ordinary" history of salvation is represented by the great religious groupings of all times and places, with their (supernatural) revelations and their prophets, and that the line of biblical revelation, accomplished in Christ and the Church, is the "special," "particular," "extraordinary" history of salvation, without an exclusiveness of revelation and prophecy. Instead of "analogies" one speaks of "convergences."

3. Application To The Case Of Muhammad

a) In the line of "classical theology." One admits the possibility of a prophethood outside the Church but according to the criterion of conformity with Christian revelation. In the case of Muhammad and the Qur'ân one can recognize such a charism, given the fact that:

-Not only is a unanimous recognition given to the sincerity of Muhammad, at least at the beginning of his preaching, but also to the value, the beauty and the merit of that preaching, at least during the Meccan period. If it is true that, especially in Medina, conflict breaks out between the "religions of the Scripture" (esp. Judaism), nevertheless the truths of the first period (monotheism, prophethood, faith in the word of God, adoration....) are maintained and developed. And then, to which Christian dogmas is the Qur'ân opposed? The true Christian dogmas or only travesties of them? And who is held to be guilty of this, Muhammad or the "people of the Scripture," closed in upon themselves? Or the Christians, divided in multiple sects?

-The most serious objection is not so much its negation of Christian "dogmas" as the final and definitive character of its revelation, by which it presents itself as a complete whole, perfect, definitive, assuming the preceding revelations and judging them according to the criterion of its own truth.

-One will therefore conclude, with Cardinal Journet, that there is present in Muhammad and the Qur'ân a prophetic charism but a partial one, limited to the part of truth (if judged according to Christian criteria) contained in the message, in particular regarding monotheism. But the partial charism does not throw light on the other truths of the (Christian) revelation.

Later, Cardinal Journet corrected his position in a more negative article, but basing himself on an erroneous piece of information.²

Moreover, already Timothy I, the Catholicos (Nestorian Patriarch) of Baghdad (c. 780), said that, if Muhammad's fight against polytheism was considered, he had worked in the way of the prophets. While refusing to call him a prophet directly, he recognized in Muhammad a certain likeness to them.

b) According to the line of the new theology of non-Christian religions, one will have no difficulty in recognizing the prophecy of Muhammad for the whole of the Qur'anic message, maintaining at the same time that the fulness of revelation is represented by the person and message of Jesus Christ.

4. Possible Answers To The Question

-Without using the word "prophet" (*nabî* or *rasûl*), because of the equivocations it can provoke between the interlocutors who each take it according to the meaning given to the term within their respective theologies, we can recognize not only the sincerity but also the religious quality and value of Muhammad (spiritual — *ruhânî* — person, inspired — *mulham* — by Allâh), as well as the grandeur and truth of the essential parts of the Qur'anic message. For more educated interlocutors one can expose with more detail and nuance the line of "classical" theology.

Note also the essential and decisive progress that the passage from polytheism to monotheism represented for the Arabs and for so many people after them.

But generally such an answer is not satisfactory for the Muslim interlocutor because, according to Muslim theology, to refuse to somebody the title of "prophet" (*nabî*) is to place him in the category of the "inspired ones" (*mulham*), such as saints (*walî*, pl. *awliyâ'*), who do not have the right to speak in the name of God. There is no middle term between the two categories. Therefore, to talk with the interlocutor in these terms may lead to underscoring the scandal instead of reducing it.

-To use the title “prophet” in its historical sense. In English the title “the Prophet,” according to admitted terminology, is used without implying a religious judgement. It corresponds to the Arabic use: *nabî 'l-Islâm*, *nabî li 'l-Islâm* (the prophet of Islam, prophet for Islam). Some add: “.....and Islam is one of the great religions that lead to God,highly spiritual....., monotheistic (*muwahhidûn*), heavenly (*samâwiyya*).” The use of this latter term actually amounts to recognition, in a roundabout way, of the prophethood of Muhammad in a religious sense, because “heavenly” (*samâwî*) implies “revealed” from on high by God.

-Instead of entering into fine distinctions regarding vocabulary, one could affirm the truth by complementary statements (dialectically): I believe that Muhammad is a prophet (*nabî, rasûl Allâh*). Christianity also recognizes all the true prophets who have announced the truth in the name of God. The difference between Islam and Christianity is that, for Muslims, Muhammad is the “Seal of the prophets” (*khâtam al-nabîyîn*), whereas for Christians the plenitude of prophethood (*kemâl al-nubûwwa*) is in Jesus Christ himself, the word of God (*kalimat Allâh*) — (as the Qur’ân, by the way, names Jesus: Q. 3,39,45; 4,171), in a sense which evidently cannot be that of the *Logos-Verbum* of the Christian tradition.

This answer seems possible and satisfactory, because it attributes to Muhammad the title of prophet in the religious sense, while at the same time respecting the originality of the Christian revelation. It is based objectively on an analysis of the Qur’ânic message and is theoretically justified in the first line of so-called “classical” theology, and a fortiori in the line of the new theology of non-Christian religions. Experience seems to show that it satisfies the Muslim interlocutor, and even makes him rejoice, without any fundamental misunderstanding.

2. CELIBACY

QUESTION: Why don’t you marry?

1. The Mentality Underlying The Question

-The natural vocation of every man and woman, created to found a family, taking responsibility for it, accepting the risks involved. A duty towards human society. Hence, a suspicion of egoism about the voluntary celibacy of someone who could get married; or the possibility of impotency will be raised. Or it may be thought, especially in the case of

sisters, that unrequited love is at the origin of their celibacy. The response then will be one of pity: "What a shame..." There will arise, too, doubts about the practice of celibacy: clandestine relations between priests and sisters, homosexual practices. This springs from the conviction, especially current among men, that celibacy is impossible; a man (or a woman) cannot live without sexual relations.

-A religious duty. For a believer marriage is an obligation; "marriage is half the faith" — *al-zawâj nisf al-îmân* is an oft-quoted *hadîth*. Moreover, man has a duty to provide protection for the "weaker sex." In other words, in a Muslim milieu (and even in a Christian milieu) celibacy is source of scandal, provokes disbelief or condemnation. However, this immediate and basic reaction is somewhat tempered today.

-Changes of mentality. In the Muslim world of today there are examples of voluntary celibacy at least on a temporary basis, on the part of both men and women, for the motive of service (v.g., elder brothers and sisters looking after younger children, nurses, social workers who are totally dedicated; *fidâ'îyyûn* and *fidâ'îyyât* devoting themselves to the cause of Palestine...) Sometimes there are personal motives (v.g., girls who seek fulfilment outside marriage or before getting married), or religious motives (unmarried pilgrims or young widows who remain in Mecca to spend a certain amount of time, or the rest of their lives, in prayer and devotions).

-Those who know us and see us living day and night recognize that our celibacy is lived seriously. They may admire it (a feat?); they may envy it. (Muslim girls sometimes express their regret that there is no such form of religious life in Islam and the wish that they could be sisters. What are their motives? Flight from marriage, or a desire for a life of dedication?) Most often people will say: "It's fine for Christians, but in Islam there is no monasticism."

2. Islamic Teaching

a) Celibacy as a human or religious ideal is not known. The Qur'ân does not mention it. The Prophet was married. There are many *hadîth*-s in favor of marriage and condemning celibacy. "Our *sunna* (tradition) is marriage (*sunnatu-nâ al zawâj*)."
(*al-zawâj nisf al-îmân*). "If I had one day to live and I were not married, I would take a wife in order to meet God as a married man." Words addressed to a Muslim who was a bachelor: "So you've decided to

belong to Satan's company! If you want to be a Christian monk, then join them openly. If you are one of us, then follow our *sunna*." One of the greatest Muslim theologians, Ghazâlî, gives a long development on the obligation of marriage: to strengthen the Muslim community, to appease one's sensuality and have a foretaste of paradise, relaxation for the mystic, to have someone to look after everyday needs and therefore be left free for prayer, to give an opportunity for practising patience in bearing with the character of one's wife (cf. *Ihyâ 'ulûm al-dîn* II, book 2, bâb 1). Nearly all the Muslim mystics, including Hallâj, were married.

b) On the other hand celibacy is not entirely unknown. The Qur'ân presents Mary, the perfect example of virginity: "She who preserved her chastity" (cf. Q. 21,91; 66,12). There is mention of John the Baptist (*Yahyâ*) who is chaste (3,39), and an implicit reference to Jesus' celibacy. Monks are mentioned with commendation (Q. 5,82; 24,36-37; 57,27; but see 9,31-34). Some Muslim ascetics and mystics will practise celibacy: There is the well-known case of Râbi'a (2nd-8th cent.) whose refusal to get married would seem to have been based on an idea of consecration to God. The handbooks of some Sufi orders encourage celibacy for religious reasons (Rahmâniyya, Bektâshiyya....). Ghazâlî allows the unmarried state if one cannot take upon oneself the expense of having a family, or if the woman's character is too difficult, or if one's wife constitutes a temptation against faith. His conclusion is that the worth of the married or unmarried state depends on circumstances. The ideal is to be able to combine married life with devotion to God. This is what the Prophet did, whereas Jesus chose celibacy because he was unable to combine the two.

3. Christian Teaching

There are three complementary elements in the motivation for consecrated celibacy:

- for the sake of the Gospel (Mt 19,12), for the Kingdom (1 Cor 7); the full flowering of charity through complete self-giving to God's plan in order to live this love and share it, thus anticipating the life of the Kingdom already begun here below.

- closer imitation of Christ and of Mary.

- the service of one's fellow men, by being a living reminder that the life of the Spirit transcends everyday matters, through complete dedication for the sake of the Gospel (though this is not to exclude married

Christians from the same dedication), through being freer to attend to men's needs and to serve the poor and needy.

4. Possible Answers To The Question

a) Where egoism is suspected: reply that celibacy is motivated by dedication to the service of man (*li-khidmat al-insâniyya*), for doing good (*li-l-ʿmâl al-khayriyya*). But this implies that we are really at the service of others, that our lifestyle is characterised by disponibility. This may not always be the case. It may not differ much from the lifestyle of married people.

b) Where the duty to get married is stressed: reply that celibacy is a consecration of oneself to God (*li-wajh Allâh*), for the sake of prayer (*al-tafarrugh li-l-salât*). This implies that people can sense the importance of prayer in our lives.

c) Where there is a suspicion of unrequited love: stress the beauty of marriage, of the Christian family; talk about one's own family or the families founded by one's brothers and sisters. Give a witness on one's vocation (*daʿwa*): God's invitation to a greater love felt in one's heart, the desire to imitate Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Tell how the vocation matured, through prayer and reflection, with the backing of one's family (if this was the case); how it became so clear that to refuse to follow it would have brought unhappiness. This implies that in our lives as celibates we give evidence of true human and spiritual fulfilment.

3. GOD, THREE IN ONE

QUESTION: Are you really montheists (*muwahhidûn*)? Do you believe in three gods? Which gods are they? How can God be called father or son?

1. The Mentality Underlying The Questions

-Pride in the absolute intransigency of Islamic monotheism.

-Appreciation of divine transcendence: God cannot be "named" by means of words which are too human.

-The words "father" and "son" have, quite naturally, human connotations and evoke carnal realities. Christians are so used to giving a spiritual meaning to these terms that they tend to forget the natural connotations and to blame Muslims for taking them into consideration.

-The explanations given by Christians are often rather confused, if not avoided altogether. The vocabulary used does not convey much, v.g., "persons," "nature." In Arabic, *shakhs* evokes the idea of a visible shape, *uqnûm* is unintelligible, while *tabî'a* would indicate a created nature.

-The Qur'ân, with regard to Christian beliefs, talks about "three" (*thalâtha*). This is the cardinal number indicating three things or persons (a triad). From the Qur'ân it would appear that the three are God, Jesus and Mary (cf. Q. 5,116).

-There is the idea that the Trinity implies a multiplicity in God with regard to his activities *ad extra* and in his relations to creatures. This holds good for paternity and filiation also.

2. Islamic Teaching

The Qur'ân blames Christians for saying "three" (*thalâtha*) in connection with God (Q. 4,171); for saying that God is the "third of triad" (Q. 5,73) which would include Jesus and Mary (Q. 5,116); for saying that Jesus is God (Q. 5,72,116) or son of God (9,30: *ibn*; 19,34-35: *walad*), for the one and only God "neither begets nor is begotten" (112,3).

For the Qur'ân Christians are "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitâb*). But there is some hesitation as to whether they should be considered monotheists (2,62; 3,110-115; 4,55; 5,69,82.....), unbelievers (*kuffâr*: 5,17,72-73; 9,30), or "associators" (*mushrikûn*: 5,31,72).

The same hesitation is to be found among Muslim exegetes and theologians. Râzî recognizes that no Christian of his time thinks that the Trinity includes Mary; this perhaps was the belief of a sect which has disappeared. Many modern writers are of this opinion also (v.g., Maulvi Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur'ân*, Lahore 1920). Theologians are aware, from the controversies with Christian apologists, of the doctrine concerning the "persons" (*aqânîm*), and faithful expositions of this doctrine can be found in their writings. The most tolerant among them, Ghazâlî, in his *Radd Jamîl* (*Excellent Refutation*), would go so far as to admit that this doctrine can be reconciled with a certain monotheism, but not with Islamic monotheism.

At the present time most modern representatives of Islamic thought admit that Christianity is truly a form of monotheism. This was strongly affirmed by Dr. Abdelaziz Kamel (former vice-president of the Egyptian

Council of Ministers) in his inaugural address to the participants in the Muslim — Christian Colloquium in Tunis (11-11-1974). On the other hand, the majority of Muslims believe that Christians are "tritheists."

3. Christian Teaching

It would seem to be of great importance to examine the steps leading up to the dogma of the Trinity and the dogmatic formulae which express it. The aim in this is to discern between the essential content of the Christian faith and the cultural expression of the dogma.

a) Jesus' Own Religious Understanding

Jesus belongs to the Chosen People of the Bible, imbued with a spirit of uncompromising monotheism. The Bible is full of God's "jealousy" towards false gods and idols. Jesus does not think differently (cf. Mk 12,32; Jn 17,3. See also: 1 Cor 8,4; 12,6; Gal 3,20; Eph 4,5; 1 Tim 1,17; 2,5).

Present-day exegesis makes it possible for us to uncover the thought and consciousness of Jesus through the post-Resurrection faith of the Apostles to which the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament bear witness. If we accept the most reliable conclusions of this exegesis, then we must admit that Jesus did not say that he was God, nor son of God, and that some hold he was most probably not conscious of the fact. Paradoxically (at least in appearance) it is when he calls himself the "Son of Man" foretold in the vision of Daniel 7 that he shows and conveys some awareness of this "heavenly" origin. Above all, he lives in a special type of relationship to the one God, whom he dares to call "Abba" ("Daddy"). The titles "Son of God" and even "Messiah" were at the time of Jesus too ambiguous to convey what he felt himself to be. As for the Spirit, he rarely speaks of Him (only Mk 3,28-30), but he lives by the Spirit, and intensely so.

b) The Apostles' Post-Resurrection Faith

It is after the Passion and the Resurrection, through the Spirit's powerful inspiration, that the Apostles understand the meaning of the experience which has been theirs during the three years they have spent with Jesus, and understand also who he really is. They give expression to this by proclaiming that Jesus, who is alive because risen from the dead, who is the same Jesus of history with whom they lived and whom they saw die on the Cross, that he is "Savior and Lord" (i.e., God), and that

his relationship to his Father made him the "Son of God" in a unique way. After this, "trinitarian formulae" become more frequent; the title "Son" is used, and also the term "Spirit" of God (*pneuma*; divine breath), whose reality they have experienced so powerfully before giving him a precise name. (See the trinitarian formulae found in Paul's writings, in the prologue of John's gospel and throughout his gospel, and Mt 28,19 — an echo of an early liturgical formula). To say that God is Father, Son and Spirit is essential to Christian faith, and it is rooted in the faith of the Apostles, in faith in the Easter reality.³

c) The Trinitarian Dogma

It was because of the Christological heresies that abounded in the 3rd and 4th centuries that the Church felt the need to define its belief both in the oneness of God and the reality of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. A slow process of maturation will lead to the complete formula given by the 4th Lateran Council (1215). This makes clear that the divine nature is one, but that it is possessed equally by three "persons": the Father as the unoriginated origin, the Son as the one deriving his origin from the Father from all eternity, and the Spirit proceeding from both, all three being equally consubstantial. It is evident that these notions, and the terms "nature," "substance," and "person," in particular, were borrowed from the philosophy of the day, which had its source in Hellenistic philosophy. This was quite normal and even inevitable.

However, the content of the dogma thus defined can only be preserved if the terms are given the "metaphysical" sense they had at the time of the Councils. Thus "person" means hypostasis as *suppositum* for acts and relations. If the term is taken according to the meaning it has today, i.e., as a synonym for "personality," autonomous center of psychological consciousness, then one would make the Council say exactly the opposite of what it intended. For "person" would convey what the Council meant by the term "nature," and so one would in fact be saying that there are three distinct natures in God! Hence, it is necessary to discover what the Council intended by the terms it used, by the dogmatic formulations which are necessarily linked with a given culture, and then reformulate the dogma, using the vocabulary of our own age and of the people we are addressing.

Finally, it is good to be aware of the emotional and carnal overtones usually carried by the titles Father and Son. This can be useful for our own religious life (to avoid the "trap" which the "Father-image" can present), as well as to help us to understand why Muslims are reticent to

use these names. It is just the opposite with the term "Spirit" which evokes the idea of something completely "spiritual," intangible and incomprehensible, instead of the "breath" (*pneuma*) of God at work in the Church and the world.

4. Possible Answers To The Questions

a) Affirm quite definitely our own monotheism. The Creed begins: "We believe in one God" (*nu'min bi-ilâh wâhid*). Moreover, according to sound classical theology, in His relations to creatures (*ad extra*) God acts as the One, the Unique.

b) This oneness of God is mysterious, as is everything about God. It is not numerical, mathematical. (The first Christian Arabs distinguished between numerical oneness, *wahdat bi'l-^cadad*, and relational oneness, *wahdat bi'l-nisba*, or general oneness, *wahdat bi'l-naw^c*.) The oneness here is that of the living God.

c) The Trinity (to express this in Arabic the intensive adjective, *thâlûth*, should be used, v.g., *Allâh thâlûth*, rather than *tathlûth*, which conveys the idea of dividing something into three parts) is particular to Christian revelation, to Christian faith. It is related to the interior life (*ad intra*) of God, and in no way infringes upon His oneness. The same God is Father, Son and Spirit. These "divine names" belong to the deposit of the Christian faith which it has received as a heritage from the very beginning. Yet they have never been understood as implying generation in God in the human sense of the term. This we are at one with Muslims in denying. Here a passage could be quoted from Bîrûnî, a learned Muslim of the 11th century:

Passing from the word *God* to those of *father* and *son*, we must state that Islam is not liberal in the use of them; for in Arabic the word *son* (*ibn*) means nearly always as much as a *child* (*walad*) in the natural order of things, and from the idea involved in parentage and birth can never be derived any expression meaning the Eternal Lord of Creation. Other languages, however, take much more liberty in this respect; so that if people address a man by *father*, it is nearly the same as if they addressed him by *sir*. As is well known, phrases of this kind have become so prevalent among the Christians, that anybody who does not always use the words *father* and *son* in addressing people would scarcely be considered as one of them. By the *son* they understand most especially Jesus, but apply it also to others besides him. It is Jesus who orders his disciples to say in

prayer, "O our *father* which art in heaven" (St. Mt 6,9), and informing them of his approaching death, he says that he is going to his *father* and to their *father* (St. John 20,17). In most of his speeches he explains the word the *son* as meaning himself, that he is the *son of man*."⁴

In other words, Christians use the terms "father" and "son" in a broad sense.

God is called "Father" in so far as He is the source of all being. He is called "Son" when this gift of life is lived to the full by Jesus. He is called Spirit when He is identified with the gift itself.

d) There should be no objection to avoiding the terms "nature," "person," when trying to clarify further what distinguishes Father, Son and Spirit. The dogma does not necessarily have to be expressed in this way and the terms may give rise to misunderstanding.

Theologians today prefer to speak about God's "modes of being" (*ahwâl*). The one God subsists in three distinct modes of being, three ways of existing, not only in relationship to us, but also in Himself.

e) According to the method suggested in the first of these documents, the advice that can be given is to take as a starting point categories of thought which are classical in Islam, i.e., the divine "names and attributes" (*al-asmâ' wa'l-sifât*), which are a human way of expressing different aspects of God, which in Him are one. Of course, strictly speaking, according to classical Christian theology, the "persons" of the Trinity do not fall into the same category as "divine names" (v.g., the All-Powerful, the Merciful, the All-Knowing...) The latter qualify the divine "nature," are possessed in an equal and undivided manner by the three "persons," and so cannot be used to distinguish them. The Christian Arabs of Baghdad who made use of the concept of "divine names" to explain the "persons" were perfectly aware of this problem. They were aware, too, of the objection from the Muslim side: why only these three "names" when there are many others? They explained that these were "names" pertaining to the divine essence (*takhuss al-dhât*), or "substantial" (*jawharî*), by this means distinguishing them from the usually accepted "divine names." Whatever the case may be, on the one hand this manner of speaking is not more incorrect than "persons" and "nature," and on the other it corresponds more closely to a Muslim's manner of understanding.

f) Finally, one should not disdain to have recourse, as did the Fathers of the Church and the Christian Arabs of Baghdad, to explanations of a more metaphorical nature, v.g., fire, a single substance which is at one and the same time heat, flame and light; the sun, which is a round disc and also light and heat; the human mind, which is understanding, word and life....

Such metaphors are often more respectful of the divine mystery than philosophical explanations.

4. THE REASONS FOR OUR PRESENCE AS CHRISTIANS AMONG MUSLIMS

QUESTIONS: Why have you come to live among us? Why did you leave your country, your family, your relatives? What do you gain by it?

1. The Mentality Underlying The Questions

-The suspicion of *tabshîr* (evangelization in the sense of proselytism). Our true aim, (formally) declared or (now) hidden, is to get Muslims to leave Islam in order to lead them to Christianity, and all our activity, our institutions, even the apparently most unselfish, have no other aim than that.

This suspicion, very deeply rooted even among the best of our friends at least as an ever-present question, is objectively justified not merely by ancient history (Crusades, Western Imperialism) still very vivid in people's minds, and by quite recent history (colonization, the Carthage Eucharistic Congress) constantly being called to mind; but also by the teaching and practice of the Church until quite recently: founding the Church by the conversion and baptism of non-Christians, while rejecting any salvific value in non-Christian religions as such.

-Alongside this, a unilateral conception of religious truth (on both sides) which leads people to think they possess the whole of this truth and that they have nothing to receive from others, and even that all other truth is a threat and an attack on their own truth. A threat and an attack which aim at both the cohesion of the Muslim social body and religious unity; abjuring one's religion is betraying one's country.

-Astonishment, and even scandal, in face of the fact of leaving one's country, one's family, forsaking one's father and mother, to go and live

in another country. Similarly, some people are astonished at seeing us leave wealthy countries where it is so nice to live (a somewhat mythical view), to come and live in these countries which lack so many things.

-Finally, seeking for some interested motive on our part: religious interest (proselytism), and personal interest (who is paying us? some foreign embassy? the Vatican?).

-But an evolution is underway. Exchanges between peoples and different cultures are multiplying both on the spot (biculturalism) and by travelling and staying abroad for reasons of study or employment. Like cultures, religions are also beginning to open up to one another, to acknowledge that they are complementary to a certain point. Above all, they find they are confronting the same problems (atheism, secularization, social problems, etc...), and they feel the need to collaborate (November Colloquium in Tunis). Many believers on both sides no longer think that their religion is the sole, valid, salvific one. In certain milieux, especially of young people, the principle of freedom of conscience is proclaimed like that of other freedoms.

2. Islamic Teaching

a) Islam is the only religion approved by God (Qur'ân 3,19); whoever follows another religion will go to hell: 3,85; 3,83; 2,130. It is an immutable religion: 9,36; perfect: 5,3; 9,32; 61,8; which abrogates and recapitulates all other religions: 24,55; and must take the place of them all: 9,33; 48,28; 61,9. Even the "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians) who had received a true revelation and a true religion, "falsified" (*tahrîf*) their Scriptures: 4,46; 5,13, 41; 2,75; and consequently they must believe in the Qur'ân: 4,47; 5,15,48; 98,1; and be converted to Islam: 3,20; 3,73; 3,95. The Muslim community (*umma*) is the best one of all: 3,110.

b) Consequently, the Qur'ân harshly condemns the Muslim apostate, doomed to hell: 3,85-90; 3,115,137; 16,106; 47,25-28; and already condemned here below to have one hand and one foot cut off and to be put on the gibbet (*salb*) (cf. Hallâj) 5,33; 7,124; 20,71; 26,49. It also harshly condemns those who "turn believers away from God's path": they must be opposed and killed (the polytheists of Mecca who had forced the Muslims to make the *hîjra* (migration) 2,217; 2,191,193; 9,12; since they attack religion, they will go to hell with no hope of pardon: 47,34).

c) On the other hand, the Qur'ân proclaims the principle of freedom of conscience: "no constraint in matters of religion" (*lâ ikrâh fî-l-dîn*): 2,256. Faith, the gift of God, is a free and personal act. And the "People of the Book" who have a right to a special status of "protection" (*dhimma*): 9,29, have their salvation secure: 2,62; 5,69; 22,17. Christians are even the closest friends to Muslims: 5,82.

d) Several Muslim theologians (Ghazâli, taken up again by Md.'Abduh and R. Ridâ) declare that whoever follows what he believes to be the truth in matters of religion and is unintentionally ignorant of the coming of Muhammad will be saved.

Many cultured Muslims think that the essential thing is for each one to follow his conscience.

3. Christian Teaching

As taught by Vatican II (especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*) and by subsequent theologians (Bourgeois, Duquoc, L'Arbresle), current reflection of the Church on herself and her relationship to the world can be expressed as follows:

By his person and his message, Christ came to bring to all humankind salvation and deliverance from all servitudes, from sin in all its forms, by calling each one to "conversion" (*metanoia*: cf. *tawba*); to get out of one's egoism and one's pride in order to open up to God, the Father of all humankind, and to his brothers, especially to the most disadvantaged (the "poor"). This is what the Gospel calls conversion to the Kingdom of God (here on earth). The Church, the communion of those who believe in Jesus Christ, has as her mission not directly to spread herself out until she embraces all men but to bear this message of personal conversion to the world, to be the ferment (the sign) of conversion to the Kingdom, which can come about in many ways within the framework of various "religions." Knowledge of Jesus Christ and explicit faith in his message have meaning only as a supreme requirement for personal conversion and testimony to our brothers, to bear this within "all nations," while, however, respecting the religious advance of each individual and each people.

4. Possible Answers To The Questions

(What we give here, and this holds good for this question perhaps more than for the others, are merely suggestions. The gradual approach

outlined here may be of some help in encouraging true dialogue which does not obey strict rules.)

a) Relations between developed and developing countries (at least from the economic point of view) are among the major problems of our time, the essential and decisive task of our day. I have chosen to come and live here and take part in this huge effort of development as a response to the Christian demand to prefer the poor and fight for their liberation, and for more justice between countries.

b) Understanding between peoples and different cultures is also one of the major problems of our time. Living in a culture different from my own, making the effort to learn the language and to know the human values of this people, I should like to be its ambassador to European peoples, who are ignorant of and so often contemptuous of those who do not resemble them. Being a "bridge," even a modest one, between peoples is an exciting task. For a Christian this is working for peace and reconciliation, essential values in the Kingdom.

c) Relations between religions have entered a new phase. The time for wars of religion, a real sacrilege against God, is no more. Islam and Christianity are more and more confronting the same problems (the faith of young people, religious education, the response of faith to the great problems of our day...). I have come to live in a Muslim country in order to take part in this dialogue and this collaboration between Christians and Muslims. Far from wanting to attempt anything against Islam, my dearest wish is for the Muslim faith to emerge victorious and more pure from the conflict with the challenges of the modern world.

d) The essential revelation brought by Jesus Christ is the universal love of God, the Father of all humankind, who loves them all without distinction, Muslims as well as Christians, with a predilection for the most weak and disadvantaged. My life as a Christian among Muslims is meant to bear witness to this universal love of God for the people of another race, another religion.

e) The Gospel's invitation to conversion to the Kingdom of God must be borne to and lived out in every nation. I have received the vocation to come and live it in a Muslim country. It is first of all a requirement of my own faith: to live out less indifferently this conversion to the Kingdom. Living among Muslims, it can happen that my relations of friendship, my attitude in the face of some problems, in some circumstance or other, will provoke them to this conversion to the

Kingdom, particularly by urging them to rediscover themselves the calls to this conversion contained in their own religious tradition. My role as a Christian is strictly limited to this: working together with my Muslim brothers for our own conversion to the values of the Kingdom of God by scrupulously respecting each one's religious vocation, as God makes it known to them.

This in no way excludes my wish to make Jesus Christ and his Gospel message known. If I were to deny this, either I would not be sincere or would not be loyal, or else it would be a perversion of the love which I claim to bear. When you love someone in truth, you cannot but desire to communicate to him all that by which you live, especially that which is the very basis of your life and your joy. Because I believe that the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel is the most powerful factor for conversion to the Kingdom of God, and hence the total fulfilment of man (while recognizing that there are other paths than this one), I cannot but desire this knowledge for my friends. But the paths and the means do not depend on me. This is the mystery of the relations between the Spirit and each conscience. My role is limited to bearing witness by my life to what this conversion through knowledge of Jesus Christ is. But it is a tremendous and demanding role. Mr. Talbi expresses differently but in an excellent manner this "logic of love" when he requires Christians to repudiate proselytism but to carry out their "duty of apostolate" by bearing witness to the truth they bear.⁵

f) As to what interest we might have in living in a country and among people other than our own, it is a real interest, though not of a financial order. It is the discovery of a different way of being man, of a style of human relations full of riches. It is at times the sharing of life with the poor which helps me to fulfil the evangelical ideal. It is the discovery of a great monotheistic religion whose essential values (the transcendence of God, adoration, submission to His will) have to be lived by the Christians in order to give their full meaning to their strictly Christian values (Incarnation, intimate life of grace with God, twofold love...). It is only by living it in a non-Christian milieu that you really fathom Christianity.

g) Finally, for some people there are particular reasons. Those who are born in this country have no reason to go and live the Gospel elsewhere. Those who are dedicated, at least in part, to the service of Christians living here. Those who are dedicated to research in Arabic and Islamics and would like to carry out their research in a living milieu.

5. MASS — THE EUCHARIST

QUESTIONS: -How do you pray? How do you perform Christian prayers (*salât*)? Why do you pray with bread and wine (or, what is that round thing and that cup)? You pray with wine! *Harâm!*

-Do you really believe God is in this bread and wine? And they become God? You eat God? What's in that little box on the altar? Why do you keep a light burning? What's the difference between mass in a big church on Sunday and Mass everyday in a wee chapel? etc....

1. The Mentality Underlying The Questions

-The notion of *salât*, ritual prayer, which comprises successive positions and precise formulae, unlike *du'â*, spontaneous prayer without rite or formulae. Thus, at the level of vocabulary and mentality, the daily and Sunday Mass (and the liturgical office) correspond to the daily *salât* (five times) and especially to the *salât al-ġumu'a*, the Friday Prayer in the mosque with sermon, etc....

-The idea of the transcendence of God and the rejection of any *hulûl* (indwelling or infusion of God in creatures, especially material ones like bread and wine). Particular scandal in the use of wine, forbidden by the Qur'ân and Islam.

-The influence of awkward conceptions and expressions, and even formally false ones, handed down by a certain Christian tradition. Thus the heresy of "impanation": "Jesus, or God, is in this bread." This error is reinforced by the word "transubstantiation" of the dogmatic formulae, for the word "substance" has today lost its purely metaphysical (as opposed to accident) meaning, and signifies exactly the contrary; the substance of a thing is today its most concrete and most material aspect, what the dogmatic formulae call the "species" as opposed to substance! Similarly, the influence of a "magical" conception of the Sacrament; the words of the priest have the power to change things automatically into other things.

2. Islamic Teaching

The Qur'ân and the whole of Muslim tradition describe Christians as people who pray, whatever might be their doctrinal errors. This is

especially the case of “monks” (*rahbâniyya*), a word covering all men and women dedicated precisely to prayer (See Qur’ân 5,82; 24,36-37; 57, 27...). The Christian convent forms part of the traditional landscape in the Muslim world. Similarly in the East as regards churches, clergy and worship, protected by special statute.

The Qur’ân contains a much more definite allusion to the Eucharist: 5,112-115. Although commentators of the Qur’ân see therein an allusion to the multiplying of loaves and the vision of St. Peter at Jaffa, Acts 10,9... (the sheet filled with unclean animals let down to earth and which Peter is invited to eat), all acknowledge that it is mainly an allusion to the Eucharist. The Apostles of Jesus ask him to bring down from heaven *mâ’ida*, a table garnished for a meal, in order to assure them he is really sent by God. Jesus asks this of God, who promises to send down this *mâ’ida*. One notes in this text that this *mâ’ida* is a gift from heaven (112), that it will be a feast (*’id*), a word which signifies a feast recurring periodically, (possible allusion to Easter and to each Sunday) to the end of time (“for the first and the last”), and that it will bring profound peace (*tuma’nîna*, 113) to the hearts of those who eat it, and these latter must bear witness to it (113), but that those who are unfaithful after having received this *mâ’ida* will be severely punished (cf. 1 Cor 11,28-33).

3. Christian Teaching

The Eucharist is essentially “the memorial of the Passion and Resurrection” of Jesus Christ who “represents” it (makes it present again) in the form of a Sacrament (the visible and effective sign).

It was instituted by the Lord himself on the eve of his Passion at the end of the paschal meal following the Jewish tradition, commemorating the “Pass-Over” from servitude in Egypt to deliverance, becoming the symbol of Christ’s Pass-Over from death to life. This is what Christ wished to signify by distributing bread and wine to his apostles, the signs of his sacrifice for life, and asking Christians to “do this in memory of me.” And in fact, as far back as we can go in the history of the first Christians, we see them renewing together these deeds of Christ.

Christ is present: “every time that two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst,” and even every time that a man opens up to God by opening up to his brothers (Mt 25, 31-46). He is present in a special manner in the Eucharistic Sacrifice by the “Sacrament” of bread and wine, which effectively represent his presence, as spiritual food of the souls of “communicants” taking part in this sacrifice.

This is a "real presence" but absolutely not a material one. The bread and wine remain bread and wine (this is what the dogmatic formulae call the "species") but they signify in depth (the "substance") Christ in his sacrifice and in his present state of Risen and Glorious Christ.

That is also why the Mass is the Christian prayer *par excellence*, since it is the presence of the prayer of Christ to his Father, offering himself wholly to Him.

4. Possible Answers To The Questions

a) For the Muslim familiar with the Qur'ân, it will always be good to start from the story of the "*mâ'ida*." As Jesus asked, we meet together around this *mâ'ida* which Jesus left us as a memorial at the end of his earthly life (we can avoid speaking of the Cross, which the Qur'ân denies). This answer most often satisfies.

b) We use bread and wine because they were the food used by Jesus, and he did so because they were the most current items of food in Palestine. In particular, wine was not forbidden to the Jews, nor is it to Christians. Later, these rites experienced an evolution (the hosts) and will experience others. At present there is a return to the national form of these items of food, and people do not see why in other civilizations the most current items of food should not be used, wherever bread and wine are unknown. "Communion" has to mean only sharing in the sacrifice of the Mass, a spiritual food and a sign of our desire to be in "communion" with our brothers.

c) The presence of Christ, who for us is God, is in the line of the Incarnation (*hulûl*). As we believe that God really became man in Jesus Christ, we believe that Jesus Christ is really present in the Eucharist. But it is the Risen and Glorious Christ. Consequently, this is not a material presence, but is rather like a "concentrated form" of the spiritual presence of Christ in the world.

d) The worship of the Blessed Sacrament reserved (hence the tabernacle and the burning light) comes from the very early practice of reserving some of the consecrated bread for the sick who were absent. Then devotion to this sign of the "real presence" developed, but it must remain within the line of communion — participation in the Eucharistic mystery.

e) Mass and any liturgy or office in a chapel are the same as in big churches. But on Sunday Christians are all urged to come and take part in the Mass in the parish churches (the "big churches").

6. THE DIVINITY OF JESUS AND THE INCARNATION

QUESTIONS: -Jesus is a great prophet who was born miraculously without a father, and who worked great miracles. But is that a reason to make him into a God, to divinize him (*ta'lih*)?

-How could one be man and God together? This is contradictory.

-How can one imagine a God who suffers and dies?

-Would Jesus be holier than Muhammad?

1. The Mentality Underlying These Questions

-The meaning of the transcendence of God who is absolutely different from any creature, and the horror of any attempt to "associate" (*shirk*) or "assimilate" (*tashbih*) a creature with God, reinforced by the formal denials of the Qur'ân.

-The meaning of the human reality of Jesus, born of a woman, and who is said to have suffered on the cross and died. Would God have abandoned His son, sacrificed him? Why?

-The influence of offensive formulae heard from Christians or read in old catechisms....The sight of "realistic" crucifixes....

2. Islamic Teaching

a) The Qur'ân often asserts the transcendence of God: "Nothing is like Him" (42,11)....He is Creator of all things and radically different from creatures.

b) Jesus has an eminent place in the line of prophets (6,85; 33,7; cf. 2,253; 3,84; 4,163...). Proclaimed by John the Baptist (*Yahyâ*), born without human father of the virgin Mary, he preaches pure monotheism to the children of Israel, works great miracles. The Jews want to kill him, to crucify him, but God saves him by raising him up towards Himself. He will come again at the end of time as a sign of the Hour (see especially

3,35-57; 4,157-158; 5,110-120; 19,16-34). He proclaimed the coming of Muhammad (61,6) and denied that he called himself God (5,116-117). The Qur'ân calls Jesus "word of God" (*kalimat Allâh*) (3,39.45; 4,171) and "spirit of God" (*rûh min Allâh*) (4,171). But it affirms that God does not beget or is begotten (*lam yalid wa-lam yûlad*) (112,3) and that Jesus is not God (5,72.116), or son of God (9,30; 19,34-35; 43,49), or the third of a triad of gods (4,171; 5,73).

c) Muslim theological tradition will aim mainly at reducing the privileges of Jesus (his miraculous birth, his miracles, his titles: word and spirit of God) to what is normal for prophets. Thus, as the Qur'ân already suggests in 3,59, the case of Adam born without father or mother is still more miraculous. The title of "word of God" merely indicates a prophet, or the creative action of the word of God causing him to be born in Mary's womb....In any case, Muhammad is a greater prophet than Jesus since he is "the Seal of the prophets" (33,40).

We need to indicate a trend in Muslim mysticism (Sufism), echoes of which can be found at present, and which makes of Jesus the "seal of holiness" (*khâtam al-walâya*), since he has been wholly endowed with the word and spirit of God, whereas Muhammad remains the "seal of prophecy" (*khâtam al-nubuwwa*).

But in general, the Qur'anic and Muslim figure of Jesus does not play a great role in the religious life of Muslims, less than that of Mary. Jesus has been "taken over" too much by Christians, his person has given rise to too many exaggerations and even blasphemies (they have divinized him), his cross has cloaked too many aggressions against the Muslims' world. And the figure of Muhammad covers the whole phenomenon of prophecy.

d) Over the last twenty years contemporary Muslim authors have been publishing "lives of Jesus" which present him either as the just man being persecuted (Kamil Husayn), or the prophet of love ('Aqqâd), or the liberator of mankind (Kh.Moh. Khalid), or draw their inspiration from the life of Jesus according to the Gospels (Fathî Uthman).

3. Christian Teaching

In order to avoid false paths (proving Jesus' divinity from the words attributed to him by the evangelists), it seems good to go over the historical development which led to the profession of (Christian) faith in the divinity of Jesus, before recalling this faith as it is understood and defined.

a) The Historical Evolution From The Awareness Of Jesus To The Paschal Faith.

According to the most sure results of current exegesis, Jesus, whatever be the "mysteries" of his birth, was born and grew up like any other man in the eyes of his compatriots. He gradually discovers God's will about himself. Leaving his family and his village of Nazareth, he experiences, at the time of his baptism by John the Baptist, his being sent by the Spirit of God as a prophet, "the prophet," proclaiming the coming of the "Kingdom of God" in the line of the "servant" described by Isaiah 49-55. He teaches with authority and works miracles, mainly healing. After a period of success, the freedom he claims in face of the upholders of the Law wins him the hostility of the leaders of the people and his being abandoned by the crowds, with the exception of a group of disciples. He has a presentiment that his end is at hand as "victim for the multitude" and dies not by stoning, as he expected in the name of the Law, but crucified in accordance with Roman law. In the dark obscurity of his faith, he keeps his trust in the God who will raise him up again. He found no "titles" capable of expressing his experience: "Messiah" had too many political overtones; "Son of God" at his time had the general sense of "beloved of God" (cf. Mt 5,9). At a pinch, use could be made of "Son of man" of heavenly origin, following the vision in the Book of Daniel, ch.7. He felt he was the prophet of the end of time in the line of the "Servant" of Isaiah, and he lived in a relationship of a unique kind with God whom he calls "my Father," and even "Abba" ("Daddy"), something no Jew would dare to do. But it is certain that he never described himself as "Only Son of God" in the sense of "eternally preexisting in God and eternally begotten by Him," in the sense in which Christian faith will later define it.

After his death, his disciples experience "corporally" that he is present and alive and therefore risen again. Under the powerful impulse of the Spirit of God, they proclaim that Jesus is "Savior" (his victory over death gives salvation) and "Lord" (i.e. God, in biblical language). Thus, the resurrection under the impulse of the Spirit reveals what this Jesus, with whom they had lived three years without understanding his real identity, really was. So they "reread" in the light of this paschal faith the events they had lived with him and tell their listeners what they must believe about him. Hence, the Gospels, witnesses of the first Christian preaching, some of the most meaningful deeds and words of Jesus, reinterpreted in the light of the paschal faith; so it is with the infancy Gospel, the scene of the baptism, of the transfiguration, etc....

But the Apostles, at least some of them, are concerned also with putting the essentials of the Christian faith about Jesus into shape. St. Paul, the first in date as regards New Testament writings, shows him pre-existing eternally before all creation (Col 1,12-20; Eph 1,3-10). St. John, in the prologue to his Gospel, describes him as the Word pre-existing eternally in God and as God Himself, then manifested in our flesh, Eternal Son of the Father, as the perfect revealer of the true face of God. Parallel to this, the credos define the common faith of Christians, and the first Councils define the person and nature of Jesus, true God and true man, against constantly recurring heresies.

b) Dogmatic Formulation

Reduced to its essentials, it consists in believing that the person who lived historically under the name of Jesus, the Galilean prophet, is the Son of God, eternally begotten by God the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit, consequently "divine in nature," and that he assumed a human nature, like to us in all things, sin and inclination to sin excepted. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 specifies that the two natures in Jesus are "without confusion, without change, without separation. The differences of the natures is in no way suppressed by their union, but rather the properties of each one are safeguarded and united in a single person and a single hypostasis" (Denzinger, 148). This formal denial of any "mixing" of the two natures explains on the one hand the obscurities in the human awareness of Jesus, and on the other hand enables the transcendence of God to be respected with regard to creatures, the mystery of the union of the two natures in the same person remaining intact.

For our purpose what needs to be underlined is that admitting Jesus to be the Eternal Son of God made man comes strictly under Christian faith, based on the faith of the Apostles; it is through their vision of faith, of which the Gospel and all the New Testament are the witnesses, that we meet up with the historical person of Jesus, and it is only under the thrust of the Spirit that we can say that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12,3). Christian faith in Jesus, such as it is defined, is therefore one of the possible readings of the historical experience of Jesus. It supposes Christian faith, and there is no point in asking others to admit it if they do not have this faith. Furthermore, we need to recognize that other "readings" of the same experience are possible outside Christian faith: a Marxist reading (cf. Garaudy, Belo...), a Muslim or Jewish reading, etc. Only two conditions can be laid down: respect for the demands of historical and literary criticism (at least if one claims to be engaged in scientific

work, since other readings are possible, poetical, for example); and to admit in turn that the Christian reading is possible even if one does not share it.

4. Possible Answers To The Questions

This mystery of the divinity of Jesus and of his Incarnation is that which is most central to the Christian faith and at the same time the farthest from Muslim faith, and consequently the most difficult to put forward to a Muslim. Before any explanation, it seems essential to situate it clearly as a mystery of the Christian faith and avoid like the plague any demonstration which endeavors to convince. If the Muslim with whom you are conversing places himself on this rational and dialectic ground, you must change the conversation. Historical (Islam-Christian polemics) and current experience shows that exchanges on this level do nothing but harm. On the other hand, if the Muslim asks us what we believe about Jesus because he wishes to be informed about our true faith, we could proceed as follows:

a) Go with him over the whole historical process of Jesus, underlining the originality of the conduct and message of Jesus, the questions which arise, the answers which his resurrection allows, but noting also the threshold of Christian faith which alone enables him to be acknowledged Savior and Lord.

b) Correct false interpretations of Christian faith. For us, faith in the Incarnation is not a "deification" (*ta'liḥ*) of a man. In the Incarnation it is the Eternal Word of God "who becomes human," who becomes man. The transcendence of God is respected by the non-confusion of the two natures. (And if you are speaking of "divine nature," do not use "*tabī'a*" in Arabic; this always means "created nature"; *tabī'a ilāhiyya* is a contradiction in terms; use *dât* or *haqīqa*). The notion of "Son of God" has no carnal echo and indicates the pure origin.⁶

c) An analogy used very early on by Christian Arabs, but in a too polemical sense, could be put forward in quite another spirit: presenting our faith to a Muslim with whom we are conversing in a language and in religious categories which mean something to him; this is that of the Qur'ân and the Incarnation. Many educated Muslims recognize, as one of them has said, that "the Qur'ân holds for Muslims the central place which Jesus holds for Christians" (M. Talbi). The Muslim believes that the word of God (*kalâm Allah*) is eternal in God (*kalâm naḥsî*) (and even identical with His essence according to several theologians), and that it

was revealed in the form of Scripture (*sâra kitâban*), the Qur'ân which is written and read (*kalâm lafẓî*). The Christian believes that Jesus is the word of God (*kalimat Allâh* as the Qur'ân calls him, but in quite a different sense from that of the Christian faith), and as such he is eternal in God and is himself God. This Eternal Word became not a Scripture, but man (*sâra insânan*), since for us Jesus is the perfect revelation of God in the history of mankind.

And always appeal to the mystery (*ghayb*) of Almighty God's will in His plan for the world.

N.B. Some people, Louis Gardet especially, readily take account of a curious text in the IV Lateran Council (1215) which states: "This reality (the divine nature) does not beget nor is it begotten" (*illa res non est generans neque genita*) (Denzinger, 432, 804), a formula which by pure coincidence gives word for word that of Sura 112,3; "*lam yalid wa-lam yûlad*." True, the context of the conciliar text is different from that of the Qur'ân. The Qur'ân was aiming in the first place at the idea of carnal generation implied in Meccan polytheism (and only secondarily at Christian doctrine about Jesus as understood). The Council was condemning the opinion of Joachim de Flora who was making divine nature a fourth reality (*res*) in God, in addition to the Trinity of divine persons. But in both cases, that of the Qur'ân and that of the Council, it was intended to affirm the oneness of divine nature. So much so, that for this reason and in order to deny all carnal generation in God, the Christian could take up the formula of the Qur'ân, provided there is no confusion.

7. ORIGINAL SIN, THE CROSS, REDEMPTION

QUESTIONS: -How can the descendants of Adam undergo the consequences of Adam's sin, and be guilty on account of this sin? How can a newborn child be born a sinner without having committed sin? Isn't each one responsible for his own actions?

-Human nature is not radically bad. Why this Christian pessimism?

-How would God have abandoned such a great prophet to the hands of his enemies? Especially, as you say he is His son? How could the eternal God suffer and die on a cross? That is blasphemy! Still more if you say that the Father "delivered up His son to be crucified"!

-The death of an innocent, just person cannot wipe away the sins of criminals, nor deliver sinners from their sins.

It is a supreme injustice that an innocent person should die in the place of the guilty.

-The forgiveness of sins in no way requires that. God is Almighty and He forgives men their sins; it is sufficient that they repent, or even that they do not abjure their Muslim faith. God is good; He is not a merciless judge.

-Is it true that Vatican II declared the Jews not guilty (*tabri'a*) of murdering the Messiah?

1. The Mentality Underlying The Questions

-Each one is responsible for his actions and will be personally rewarded or punished for them. The idea that the children bear the sins of the father, and the idea that someone should expiate for others, are totally unacceptable.

-Sin, apart from apostasy and "associating (something) with God (*shirk*), is not so serious. It is mainly a breaking of moral or social conventions (*harâm*), at the worst, of the revealed Law (*Sharî'ah*), but is not an attack on God Himself. He is too transcendent to be assailed by man's sin. One can be a good Muslim without observing the law fully....And God easily forgives.

-The Cross, the crucifix, is the scandal of the Incarnation pushed to the limit: a God made man who dies "accursed." The crucifixion of Christ is formally denied by the Qur'ân. The Cross served as a symbol for enterprises which scarcely bore witness to Christian love: the Crusades (the word linked to that of Cross in English as in Arabic: *salîb* (cross) — *hurûb salîbiyya* (wars of the Crusades), colonialism, the defence of the Christian West (in Algeria)...still very keen memories incessantly confused by the mass media. The opposition of "Cross and Crescent."

-The influence of simplified or debatable Christian formulae which could be read in old catechisms: "Christ expiated for us..." "He satisfied divine justice." Popular conceptions about the sin of Adam and its consequences.

2. Muslim Teaching

a) Man and Sin

The Qur'ân relates the sin of Adam in terms and in temper very close to those of the Bible (2,30-38; 7,19-27; 20,117-128). It will be noted that Adam's fault is rebelling against God's order (which forbade eating from the tree of life), that this sin of Adam and "his spouse" has consequences for their descendants who are excluded from Paradise like them, subject to temptation from the Devil, and who begin at once to be at enmity with one another. Finally, Adam repents and God forgives him.

In other respects, the Qur'ân protests violently against collective responsibility: "No soul will bear the burden of another" (*lâ taziru wâzira wizra ukhrâ*, 6,164; 17,15; 35,18; 7,28; 39,7) is very often quoted. The fact that "our fathers" have sinned cannot excuse criminals. Each one is called to answer personally. The rendering of account at the Last Judgment will be strictly individual (52,21; 53,38; 56,4-11; 82,19; and especially 99,7-8: "Whoever has done the weight of an atom of good (or evil) will see it"). However, the Qur'ân recognizes that man is naturally inclined towards evil. One could note that each time that the Qur'ân speaks about man in general (*al-insân*), it is nearly always to say he is rebellious (*ʿasî*), "unfaithful" (*kafûr*), violent, impatient, an arguer, inconstant (2,75; 3,72; 5,61; 6,43; 7,94-95; 14,34; 17,11.67.100; 18,54-55; 21,37; 33,72; 48,26). He never stops shedding blood and sowing scandal (2,30), from the first bloodshed, that of Adam's son killed by his brother (5,27-32), to the blood of the prophets killed by the children of Israel (2,61; 3,21.112.181.183; 4,155; 5,70). The Qur'ân, followed here by Muslim moralists, speak of the "soul instigator of evil" (*al-nafs al-ammâra bi-l-sû'*, 12,53).

In addition, the Qur'ân speaks of the solidarity of men in sin just as in good. The impious gives birth to impiety, the lost seek to lead astray (2,109; 3,69.98.110; 5,49), and are solidary against God (5,78; 8,73; 21,54), whereas believers are solidary and help one another for good (3,79; 4,114; 9,71; 60,10).

As regards intercession (*shafâ'a*), the Qur'ân and Muslim theologians admit that each prophet will intercede for his people (24,62; cf. 3,159; 4,54; 8,33), and especially Muhammad for believers, but always with God's permission, and if one has asked forgiveness (2,255; 10,3; 19,67). In Sufi circles, especially those of the Sufi orders or brotherhoods, there will be a tendency to multiply the number of in-

tercessors (*walī*, *awliyā*: saints, friends of God), at the risk of encouraging superstition and incurring the blame of theologians.

b) The Cross

It is formally denied by the Qur'ān: "They (the Jews) did not kill him; they did not crucify him; but they had the impression of doing so" (4,156; cf. 3,55). Whatever be the explanations of the Qur'ānic exegetes of this "impression" (*shubbiha la-hum*) — a "double" (the leader of the Romans, Judas, or St. Peter) is substituted for Jesus and crucified in his stead — there is no doubt in Muslim tradition as a whole: Jesus was not crucified; but God took him up to heaven, putting him out of reach of his enemies, and he will come again at the end of time as a premonitory sign of the end of the world. We need especially to understand why the Qur'ān and Islam are led to deny what generally appears as a point of history difficult to deny. It is the very logic of the Qur'ān, more than the influence of Docetist or Gnostic heresies, which leads to this conclusion. In the Qur'ān the stories concerning the series of successive prophets are all cast in the same mold: the prophet sent to a people is rejected by it, apart from a small number; people want to kill him, but God saves him by a miracle. God cannot abandon to his enemies the one He has sent. The case of Jesus follows the pattern. However, at Medina, the Qur'ān reproaches the children of Israel, the ancestors of the Jews, with having killed prophets.

c) Forgiveness of Sins

God is very often described as the one who forgives amply. The sinner's repentance is correlative with God's forgiveness, which even precedes and causes man's repentance (9,118). The theologians will say that repentance wipes away sins, necessarily, according to the Mu'tazilites; if God so wills, say the Ash'arites, who paradoxically add that human repentance and divine forgiveness are mutually exclusive: if man repents, his sins are wiped away; if he does not, then God can forgive him. In any case, according to the Ash'arites, whoever preserves "an atom of (Muslim) faith" in his heart will go to Paradise. The Qur'ān and modern theologians insist, on the contrary, on the value of works.

3. Christian Teaching

a) Original Sin

There is at present unanimous agreement among exegetes and theologians on the meaning of the texts in Genesis ch. 3 and Romans

5,12-21. It is not a scientific explanation of the appearance of man on earth and of the phases of his evolution, but a "myth" (a symbolical story) with a doctrinal aim, which starts off from the existential observation of evil and sin in the world.

Since the advent of man on earth, whatever be the forms of this appearance, he has fallen into sin: egoism, murderous hatred, revolt against God, idolatry.... Every man can experience within himself this struggle between the good he would like to do and the evil which attracts him (Rome 7,21-25). This tendency is registered deep down within man, so that the child which is born bears it within itself. He is not spontaneously attuned to God's will, in friendship with Him, but he inherits a "nature" marked by a long history of good and evil and, in particular, by this network of personal sins which corrupts communications and communion between men, and between men and God; what Scripture calls "the sin of the world." That is why, concludes St. Paul, every man, whether Jew, Greek or pagan, needs to be saved by the grace of Christ. The baptism of infants is explained in his way, as well as being the entry into the Christian community.

Thus, there is no question of an inheritance constituting a personal sin, of a hereditary sin, of which each one would be guilty from birth and of which he would bear the "stain" even before any personal sin. No text in the Bible or of the Magisterium allows us to speak of the transmission of guilt. Ezekiel 18 protests strongly against this idea and Jesus takes up this denial (Jn 9,2-3; Mt 16,27.....).

b) The Cross and Redemption

They have given rise to formulations and deformations of religious sensitivity: "dolorism" bordering on masochism, the ideal of passive obedience, the settling of accounts with divine justice, penal or "vicarious" substitution, etc., and today the supreme sacrifice of a revolutionary leader. Let us call to mind a few basic truths?

1. The Cross Is The Normal Outcome Of Jesus' Life

It is, first of all, the life of Jesus which is liberating and redeeming. By his attitude of freedom in the face of a religious law which had become stifling ("man made for the Sabbath") and his fidelity in revealing the true face of God, a Father who loves all men and forgives sinners, he incurred the hostility of the leaders of the Jewish people. The latter, even in good faith and not without qualms of conscience, and with the

complicity of the people disappointed in Jesus, condemned him to death and delivered him over to the Roman power, which executed him according to its laws by the classical and terribly commonplace punishment of crucifixion.

We can, with C. Duquoc, pick out three dimensions in the life of Jesus which knowingly led him to this end:

-The example, very much alive at the time of Jesus, of the "martyr prophet" put to death for having preferred fidelity to the message received from God to his own life.

-The attitude of the Messiah who refuses the miraculous power of God to establish the Kingdom of God (temptations, insults on the cross, etc...) and disappoints the crowds who were expecting a liberating Messiah with a political role.

-The Son who forgives. He reveals God the Father, who forgives; he does not come to judge and condemn but to reconcile all sinners, reintegrating into the community those excluded, giving them the first place. He asks his disciples to forgive seventy times and to love their enemies. Finally, he dies while he himself forgives his executioners.

2. The Resurrection Alone Gives Redemptive Meaning To Jesus' Death

By resurrecting Jesus, God ratifies the meaning He gave to his life and to his death. And He makes Jesus alive and present in the life of all men for all time. He makes the meaning of his life and death present to us, "something contemporary," with its power to free from sin and death. Henceforth, each man is "saved" if he accepts, wittingly or not, to enter into the life of Jesus by reliving with him fidelity to the truth which comes from God, love of his brethren as far as sacrificing his life, forgiving adversaries and enemies, breaking in this way the chain of hatred, from the most violent to the most commonplace, which binds executioner and victim in the same slavery. In a word: causing love to triumph over hatred.

Jesus is "Lord and Savior," "Redeemer," by his resurrection which transforms his life and exemplary death and brings entry into life as Son of God. In this sense, it will be said, with Scripture, that Jesus died not just "because of our sins," as victim of the so commonplace misunder-

standings and hatreds in which we constantly share, but "for our sins," in order to show us the way to follow to free ourselves from them and give us strength and grace.

3. The Reflection Of The Early Christians On Jesus' Life And Death

The men and women disciples of Jesus are completely surprised by the resurrection. After having believed in the final failure of this prophet, they were transformed in the Holy Spirit by the experience of the presence of Jesus alive and risen. They proclaim him "Lord and Savior." Quite naturally, they seek out the meaning of this scandalous death, starting from their experience of the resurrection and with the help of schemas which their biblical culture suggests to them. Thus the theme of the Suffering Servant dying for his people (Is 50,5-8; 53,1-12) (dying for our sins); the theme of "Redeemer," a Latin word which translates the Hebrew *goel*: it is Yahweh who "saves" His people by delivering them from the bondage of Egypt and who "acquires them" (redeems, purchases) as His own people; the theme of "spiritual sacrifice," the sacrifice of his own person which takes the place of all the sacrifices of sacrificial victims.

This effort of the early Christians to make the death of Jesus intelligible in the light of his resurrection is transcribed in the writings of the New Testament, in the Gospels which make Jesus foretell his death and resurrection and project the light of Easter on to the stories of the crucifixion, as well as in the writings of St. Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews, which already provide a theology of the Redemption. It is from this reflection that arises the vocabulary of Christian tradition, passing from Hebrew, to Greek, to Latin, to other languages... redemption, buying back, expiation, sacrifice, reparation, substitution....

4. Theologies Of The Redemption

From this vocabulary, but cutting it off from its biblical roots, the theologies of the Redemption are going to use the cultural frameworks of their time and especially the juridical categories so dear to the Latin world. Thus we have:

i) The Penal Theory (Latin Fathers, St. Augustine). Sin demands punishment equal to the fault. Christ takes upon himself this punishment, and "redeems" us by paying the debt due to divine justice. (Some Fathers will even say that Christ paid the debt to the devil who had gained possession of man).

ii) The theology of Substitution or Satisfaction (Tertullian, based on Roman law; St. Anselm, based on Germanic law). Sin is an offence against God. God being infinite, the offence is infinite and calls for infinite reparation. Finite man is incapable of this. The love of God provides a remedy by substituting His own Son for man. He can thus "satisfy" divine justice.

iii) In the Middle Ages, the great theologians, St. Thomas in particular, will throw into relief the plan of love in the Redemption. God could forgive sins directly. But to forgive so easily would be to set little value on man. God wanted to make him share in his salvation and forgiveness, first of all by Christ who is true man, and then by every man who by faith and conversion can share through his life in his salvation and "merit" it by a grace which raises him to supernatural life.

iv) More recent theologies insist on the interior attitude of Christ: out of love for the Father and for us, he accepts to die for us; "moral" reparation of "vicarious" substitution (cf. J. Rivi re), substitution "of service" (cf. W. Pannenberg). The outlook, however, remains juridical, and, apart from Pannenberg, the Cross is separated from the Resurrection.

We need to retain from these theologies the effort to take account of the "onerous" character of our redemption (penal theory), the assuming by Christ of a sinful humanity, of which he accepts the consequences (substitution), the sharing of man in his salvation (merit), the voluntary offering Christ makes of his life (sacrifice). But we can dispense with their juridical framework, and especially we must not separate the Cross from the life of Jesus and from his Resurrection.

4. Possible Answers To The Questions

a) Original Sin

It is not a personal sin, nor even some guilt inherited from Adam, but the symbol of the sin of each man and of the history of the sins of humankind. Sin is a personal act and each one is alone responsible. But no one is unaware of the tendency to evil in us and the bad influences which play upon us in this sense.

b) The Cross of Jesus

It is an historical fact which it is difficult to deny. But I seem to

understand the reasons which lead the Qur'ân to deny it: it is to safeguard God's Providence towards His chosen ones. For us Christians too, God did not abandon Jesus on the Cross, for we believe He raised him up and transformed his death into glory. Moreover, God did not "deliver up Jesus to death" according to some scenario foreseen in advance, in which all the walkers-on only play out their role. Jesus was put to death because of his attitude during his life towards God and towards the Law. He was the victim of the forces of evil: hatred: injustice...., which are still the evil of the world.

This is why Vatican II, while not denying that the leaders of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus were responsible for his death, especially indicated sin as being responsible for this death. It refused to consider the descendants of these Jews, the present-day Jews, as responsible for the errors of their ancestors.

c) Redemption

This is neither a problem of re-establishing divine justice, nor the substitution of some innocent person who would expiate for the guilty, nor the whim of some vindictive God, nor even a "necessity" for the forgiveness of mankind. It is the example of One who gives his life for those he loves (the Arabic word *al-fidâ'* which translates redemption in the East clearly indicates this), an example which is ratified by God who raises him up again and thereby gives us the strength to free ourselves from sin.

8. SCRIPTURE AND THE WORD OF GOD

QUESTIONS: -Why are there four Gospels, and not just one? Which is the real one?

-The Gospels are full of disagreements and contradictions. Does that not prove that they are false?

-The authentic Gospel agreed with the Qur'ân and announced the coming of the Prophet. Christians have lost this Gospel, or changed its text, or have failed to understand it. In fact, people believe that this authentic Gospel has been rediscovered. It is the Gospel of Barnabas.

-The Gospels, like all the books of the Bible, cannot be the word of God, since they bear the names of their authors

— Matthew, Mark, Isaiah, etc., who must at least have transmitted them.

-Those who transmitted the words of the Bible do not form an uninterrupted chain, for some, like Luke, never met Christ.

1. The Mentality Underlying The Questions

Essentially, the Gospels, and indeed the whole Bible, are judged by the Qur'ân, which is taken as the model for all Scripture. The Qur'ân is literally the word of God, dictated letter by letter to the Prophet, who simply wrote it down. The text of the Qur'ân is therefore unique and unchangeable, independent of all human factors. The Qur'ân, and all true Scripture, is the word of God in the most complete sense.

Since the Qur'ân is the model by which all Scripture must be tested, the Bible, including the Gospels, can only be regarded as the word of God in so far as it is in agreement with the Qur'ân. The only authentic teaching contained in the Gospel is the teaching of the Qur'ân. A man therefore who possessed the Qur'ân does not need to read the Gospels, or any other Scripture, since these have all been more or less distorted. The only reason we can have for reading the Gospels is to examine the source of our doctrines, and of our life, or out of simple curiosity.

2. Islamic Teaching

a) There is only one eternal Scripture, the Mother-Scripture, which is with God (*Umm al-Kitâb*, 3,7; 13,39; 43,4). This is the very word of God, written and preserved on the "well-guarded Table" (*al-lawh al-mahfûd*, 85,22). This primordial Scripture was revealed to certain great prophets down the ages: to Moses, in the form of the *Torah* (by and large the Pentateuch), to David, in the form of the Psalms (*zabûr*), to Jesus in the form of the Gospels (*injîl*), and finally to Muhammad in the form of the Qur'ân in straightforward Arabic. All these Scriptures were dictated by God to the prophets, whose task was simply to transmit them faithfully.

b) Each of these Scriptures corresponds to a new stage in the progress of humanity. They are successive "editors" of the same eternal Scripture and they all offer the same message, which amounts essentially to a command to worship only the one true God. They must therefore be in agreement. In particular, they must all be in agreement with the

Qur'ân which, as the final, complete and perfect "edition," is the necessary criterion for all Scripture. When they disagree with the Qur'ân, this is because their guardians, Jews and Christians, have falsified (*harrafa, tahrîf*) their Scriptures. The real edition of the Gospels therefore is in agreement with the Qur'ân.

c) Muslim theologians and apologists prove in various ways that the Torah and the Gospel have been falsified.

-The Torah speaks of the death of Moses (Deut 34), while it was to him that the Torah was revealed. It hardly speaks of resurrection, which is an essential article of faith. In fact, the Torah was invented by Esdras in the reign of King Josiah.

-The Gospels, as we have them, are full of contradictions: on the genealogy of Jesus, on Peter's denials, on the entry into Jerusalem. Further, they are the work of four authors, of whom one at least never met Jesus. They are therefore not in conformity with the criterion for reliable transmission: the *hadith mutawâtir* (hadith of which the same text has been transmitted by an uninterrupted chain going back directly to the author).

-Christians admit that they have eliminated a certain number of Gospels (called the apocryphal gospels). These must have included the real Gospel, which must agree with the Qur'ân. Further, it seems that this real Gospel has been recovered. It is the Gospel of Barnabas. (In fact this is a forgery, fabricated in the 14th century by a Spanish Muslim, and in complete agreement with the Qur'ân.)

-Above all, the prophecy of the coming of Muhammad has been suppressed both in the Torah and in the Gospels (cf. Qur'ân 7,157; 61,6). Nevertheless, there are still traces of this prophecy in the text which has been retained. The Torah speaks of the coming Messiah, and the Gospel speaks of the Paraclete "who will reveal all truth to you" (Jn 14,17).

-Nevertheless, there are important Muslim thinkers, both ancient and modern, who admit the textual authenticity of the Bible as we have it today, and who think the falsification lies in the interpretation which has been given to it. So Avicenna, Ibn Khaldoun, Md'Abduh. Some contemporary scholars who are aware of modern Christian scholarship even accept as possible the interpretation of the Apostles and the first Christians, which produced the text of the Gospels on the basis of the

historical fact of Jesus. They would add, however, that this does not exclude the possibility of other interpretations, including the Muslim interpretation.

-In the same way, scholars are also beginning to apply to the Qur'an the principles of modern exegetics and of literary analysis.

3. Christian Teaching

a) For Christians and Jesus the word of God is not in the first place the written word of the Bible but the event to which the Bible bears witness, namely, the action of God in human history. This action manifests itself in the Old Testament, in the Exodus, the event which created the people of Israel, the entry into the Promised Land, the return from exile. In the New Testament God's action manifests itself in the event of Jesus Christ, the perfect revelation of God, for he is the Son of the Father, the Word of God.

b) The Bible, including the four Gospels, is not literally the word of God. It is, however, in a very special way the witness of God. God's message was first transmitted orally. This applies both to the Old and the New Testaments. An example of this oral message is the announcement by Peter in the Acts of the Apostles that Christ is risen. Little by little the message was written down, but under the guarantee of the Holy Spirit. This is what is meant by the inspiration of Scripture. In this way, the text of our Scriptures, privileged witness of the word of God, came into being. Christ and the Apostles are continually referring to what the Jewish culture of the first century regarded as Scripture. We need therefore to pass through Scripture to discover the word of God.

c) The Scriptures are therefore an interpretation, though a privileged interpretation, of the word of God. Further, in the case of the Gospels this interpretation is adapted to the needs of the early Christian communities; the word of God is "realized" in concrete situations. This is how we are to explain the differences perceptible in the Gospels and in the other writings of the New Testament. They are different facets of the same prism. The genealogies of Jesus, the miracle stories, the accounts of the Last Supper and the Passion, even the personality of Jesus himself, his words and deeds, all are presented in the light of his resurrection, which is the complete unveiling of his real personality.

d) The principles of historical and literary criticism (exegesis) are therefore applied to the text of the Scripture to discover the different

stages of its composition and to distinguish what must be regarded as interpretation on the part of the early Christians, and what is actual historical fact, including the death and resurrection of Jesus. In this way, using as a guide the Scriptural interpretation of Jesus, he can be "actualized" for our time. All new interpretations are made in the Church, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

4. Possible Answers To The Questions

a) Avoid discussing differences between the four Gospels or trying to bring them into harmony.

b) Realize the logic of the Muslim position in judging the Gospels by the Qur'ân. A Muslim friend could be invited to understand the Christian understanding of the Scriptures as the word of God.

c) For us, the Word of God is Jesus himself, as indeed the Qur'ân calls him (*kalimat Allâh* 4,171; cf. 3,39.45). The Gospel is not in the first place a book. The Greek word, *euangelion*, means "good news" of salvation (*al-busrâ*), which is the message of Jesus. This message was delivered orally by Jesus, then transmitted orally by his disciples (cf. the *Sahâba*, the companions of the Prophet), who survived him and were witnesses of his life, death and resurrection.

What are called "the four Gospels" represent four traditions. The traditions were at first oral, and were written down during the first century. All four traditions go back to Apostles who had known Jesus. St. Luke says that he consulted eye-witnesses before writing his Gospel (Lk 1,4), and St. Mark was the disciple of St. Peter. All four Gospels are therefore connected with the person of Jesus, but they present the facts of Jesus' life and the message he taught according to the special needs of those whom the authors were addressing: Christians converted from Judaism, Christians with a Greek background, etc. This explains both the essential agreement of the Gospels and their accidental disagreements.

d) The text of the Gospels has remained the same since they were composed in the first century, apart from some minor variations. We possess papyrus manuscripts of the Gospels dating from the beginning of the second century, which is less than fifty years from the composition of the last Gospel. (The oldest manuscript of the Qur'ân dates from about fifty years after the Uthmân edition.) Critical editions of the Gospels have been published, showing the small textual variations.

e) The meeting at Tripoli in February, 1976, declared that Christian — Muslim dialogue requires that each party accept the authenticity of the other's Scriptures, on which its faith is based.

f) The traditions represented by the four Gospels constitute the Christian interpretation of the event of Jesus Christ. They were drawn up in the light of faith in the risen Christ, and they suppose that same faith in the reader if he is to meet Christ who is its object. Those who do not share the Christian faith can treat the Gospels as historical documents, and offer other interpretations than the interpretation of faith. This is what is done by rationalists, Jews, Marxists, and, perhaps, Muslims. Each interpretation has its own value, provided that it is based on a critical study of the texts, and provided that people accept the possibility of other interpretations.

9. THE SPIRITUAL AND THE TEMPORAL

QUESTIONS: -Is Christianity only interested in souls, or in bodies as well?

-The distinction between State and religion is foreign to Islam. It is a Western and a Christian concept. Does it not imply a lack of interest in men's life in this world?

-Christianity talks of a distinction between what is due to God and what to Caesar. How then can we explain enterprises like the Crusades and colonization, undertaken in the name of Christianity?

-Christianity is too spiritual, and is only interested in salvation in the next world. What has it to say about life in this world?

1. The Mentality Underlying The Questions

-Islam is the last revealed religion. It completes all preceding religions. Judaism was too materialistic; Christianity was too spiritualistic. Islam is the complete religion (cf. Qur'ân 5,3 and 2,143, *dîn wasat*, according to the traditional interpretation). It is concerned with the body as well as with the soul, with social and political life as well as with life of the spirit, with earthly happiness as well as with heavenly. Christianity, on the other hand, sacrifices the body to the soul. It is only interested in religion (*dîn*) and ignores matters of the State (*dawla*). It sacrifices earthly happiness to the hope of heaven.

This idea of Christianity has been widely held by Muslims during the last hundred years especially, largely as a result of the apologetic writings of Muhammad 'Abduh, and of the reforming school of Salafism (Rashid Ridhâ, Algerian Ulémas). It must be admitted that the image of Christianity presented by nineteenth-century Christians gave grounds for such an oversimplified view. Phrases like "this vale of tears" and "saving one's soul"; a negative approach to the body and especially to sexuality considered as the great area of sin; a private religion, which tended to regard politics as somehow "unclean": all these features of nineteenth-century Christianity gave Muslims good reasons for regarding it as too "otherworldly." The tradition of monasticism, an exclusively Christian phenomenon, was regarded as a "flight from the world" (*al-firâr min al-dunyâ*), even if today Christians who consecrate themselves to the religious life recognize an obligation to practice "good works" (*al-a'mâl al-khayriyya*).

-It should, however, be recognized that this typically Muslim view of Christianity has undergone certain modifications in recent years. Muslims have been interested in the attitude of the Church, and of the Pope, to peace, the Palestinian problem, and the Third World.⁸ Muslims have also noticed the work for justice in the Churches of Latin America, South Africa and South Korea.

2. Islamic Teaching

a) The Qur'ân

The teaching of the Qur'ân is essentially religious, but from its beginning in Mecca Islam has taken the side of the poor and powerless against oppression by the rich. The prophecy of resurrection and the Last Judgment was intended to warn the rich of the punishment awaiting them if they did not mend their ways. This preaching throughout the Mecca period was offensive to a society dominated by the rich, and it brought hostility and even persecution to the first believers.

Shortly after the Hejira, an independent community established itself around the Prophet at Medina. It gradually increased in strength, and finally came to dominate Mecca and the whole of Arabia. So the Qur'ânic revelation during the Medina period includes prescriptions about the spiritual life (prayer, fasts, virtues and vices), but also about the temporal life (organization of the individual, married and social life; contracts, marriage, inheritance, rules for the conduct of war and the sharing out of booty; duties of leaders, obligation of consulting inferiors; penal laws, rights of Muslims and non-Muslims).

b) Muslim tradition drew from this historical evolution during the period of revelation the theory of Islam as a total religion, embracing the needs of man both as body and as soul, both as an individual and as member of a State. *Al-Islâm dîn wa-dawla*: Islam is both religion and State. It is concerned with the needs of life on earth as well as with the future life. "The good Muslim is not he who uses Islam's concern for this world to lose sight of the future life; the good Muslim does not sacrifice this life for the sake of the life to come; the good Muslim is the one who is at ease in this world and in the world to come" (Hadith).

Islam refused to separate the spiritual and the temporal. It did, however, recognize their distinction. The classical treatises distinguished between acts of worship (*ʿibâdât*), which were invariable, and social relations (*mʿâmalât*), which necessarily were variable. A hadith puts the following reply into the mouth of Muhammad when he is asked a question about worldly behavior: "You know more about the things of your world than I do" (*Antum aʿlamu bi-amri dunyâ-kum*). The commentary of Baydâwî on Qurʾân 43,63, adds: that is why the prophets were not sent to explain the things of this world, but those of religion.

c) In the history of Islam, the Caliph, successor of the Prophet and "the shadow of God on earth," is the "Commander of the Believers" (*Amîr al-muʾminîn*). He and his representatives are invested with civil rather than with religious powers, for Islam knows neither religious hierarchy nor official teaching office. Nevertheless, they have real religious responsibility for "ordaining the good and forbidding the evil" (*al-amr bi-l maʿrûf wa-la-nahy ʿan al-munkar*). As L. Massignon describes it: Islam is "a lay and egalitarian theocracy." Since the creation of modern Muslim states, Islam, the State religion (*dîn wa-dawla*), has logically become "the religion of the State" (*dîn al-dawla*), with some exceptions like the Turkey of Atatürk, Syria, S. Yemen.

d) During the last century or so, certain Muslim thinkers have realized the inconveniences of a "State religion." These inconveniences concern both the State itself, which is subordinated to a religious ideology, and may come under the control of religious conservatives who impede necessary reforms; and also religion, which is often turned into an instrument of government, with "sermons" (*khotbas*) preached by government ministers. There have therefore been demands for a separation of Church and State, and for a purely secular State. The most famous, because the most scandalous, advocate of such reform was the Sheikh (of Al-Azhar) ʿAli Abderrâziq. In his work *Al-Islam wa-usûl al-hukum* (Islam and the roots of power), which appeared in 1925, he

declared that the message of Islam was essentially religious, and that the organization of a Muslim state was not part of the Prophet's mission.⁹ He was condemned by his colleagues, but his influence remains. The message he preached has been repeated in Egypt, Syria, the Maghreb and Pakistan (Detlev Khâlid), as well as by Socialists and Marxists.

On the other hand, conservative elements, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, are violently opposed to the idea of a secular State, which they call "a Western and Christian heresy," and they reproach modern Muslim states with being unfaithful to the Qur'ân. Many Muslims hesitate between these two tendencies of complete integration and complete separation of religion and State. They appreciate the advantages of a State religion, in that religious education is provided in schools, and the faith of the weaker brethren is reinforced by social pressures; but they also recognize that an established religion hardly favors a more personal and disinterested faith.

3. Christian Teaching

a) Body and Soul

The Bible, in both the Old and the New Testaments, knows nothing of the distinction between body and soul. Man is a body endowed with life and spirit. After death, the whole man dies, or goes to Sheol, to await the final resurrection, which was only recognized at the very end of the Old Testament period. Sin is especially a spiritual matter, and consists in worshipping false gods.

It was the Greek philosophy of Plato and Plotinus, which entered the Christian tradition via Alexandria and St. Augustine, which led in the fourth and fifth centuries to the exaltation of the soul at the expense of the body. (Plato thought that man was essentially a soul imprisoned in a body, from which it aspired to free itself so that it might find its way unencumbered to God.) The Platonic conception of man has had a profound influence on Christian thought, but there is a strong tendency today, under the influence of modern anthropology (cf. Freud), to return to the Biblical conception of man. We are coming to a new understanding of the meaning of "flesh" (mortal man, not yet saved) and "spirit" (the same man, but saved) as used by St. Paul and St. John. The whole man is saved and made holy. This includes man as a sexual being, since this is part of his nature as an individual directed towards individuals. It is, however, recognized that man's sexuality on account of its passionate strength can be the source of disorders, although these are

less serious, because less voluntary, than faults of a "spiritual" order, especially sins against charity.

b) Religion And State, Faith And Politics

Historically, Christianity and Islam have followed the same path of evolution. At the outset, they were constituted by a spiritual message which had social implications and which raised questions about unjust political and social structures. The very success of the religious message led it to become dominant in society until both Christianity and Islam became State Religions. Finally, under pressure of secularists demanding autonomy for temporal structures, and on account of religious objections to a State system of religion, both religions submitted their revealed sources to fresh examination, and moved towards a situation of independence vis-à-vis the State.

There was, however, a difference in the ways in which Christianity and Islam undertook this re-examination of their sources. The movement from a religion which queried the social structures to the establishment of a State Religion took place, in the case of Islam, during the actual lifetime of its founder, that is, during the period of the Qur'ânic revelation itself. Muslim thinkers therefore who advocate separation of State and religion have to interpret the Qur'ân in a manner which is in disagreement with the Muslim tradition. This is what was attempted by 'Ali Abderrazîq and his followers. Christianity, on the other hand, only became a State religion in the fourth century, under the Emperor Constantine; there is no trace of the idea of a "Christian State" anywhere in the New Testament. Jesus Christ did not found a state, nor established a special Christian community distinct from other secular societies. The Christian is a citizen among other citizens, with the same rights and the same duties, even when the leaders of the State are pagans. On the duties of Christians towards pagan rulers, cf. Rom 13,1-7; 1 Tim 2,1-2; Titus 3,1; 1 Peter 2,13-15.

The attitude of Jesus Christ, and of the New Testament, can be summed up in terms of a double refusal:

-Temporal glory and temporal power were rejected in favor of Christ and of Christianity. "My Kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18,36); "You must give to Caesar what is due to Caesar, and to God what is due to God" (Mt 22,21, and parallels; cf. Mt 17,27). Whenever the crowds wished to make him King, Jesus escaped (Jn 6,15; 12,12-36; Palm Sunday). Indeed, the immediate cause of the death of Jesus was

precisely the disappointment of the people at his refusal of temporal power, for they were looking for a triumphant Messiah. A "triumphalist" Christianity enjoying temporal power is in contradiction with the Gospel. Christianity is "the religion of the Cross," and the only success it seeks is the conversion of hearts through death and resurrection.

-But Christianity also rejects all injustice in the political and social order. Jesus' own life consisted of a permanent and sometimes violent confrontation with any religious or secular system which offended the rights of men, and especially of the "poor." This was another cause of his death. The demands of God, which are also the demands of "the poor" to whom the Kingdom is promised, must be preferred to the demands of Caesar (i.e., of the political power), and indeed the former provide the criterion for judging the latter. "It is better to obey God than men" (Acts 4,19; 5,29; cf. Mt 10,18). Love for God is inseparable from love for men; indeed love for men is the proof of love for God, and it may have to go to the extreme of giving one's own life (Jn 15,13; Mt 25,40; 1 Jn 3,16; 4,20). The Christian's love for his brothers is bound to involve him in conflict, even to the point of revolt, with any public injustice; "political commitment" in this sense is inseparable from Christianity.

From the time of Constantine, Christianity became the State religion in most Western countries; and in some countries, like Ireland, Spain and Italy, it retains this status. Further, the absence of civil government led the Papacy to assume that office, and this was the origin of the Papal States. Finally, the situation of Christianity gave rise to the "Two-Sword theory," i.e. the spiritual sword and the temporal sword, both wielded by the Pope, who consecrated kings and emperors. This confusion of the two powers led the Church to sanction, and even herself to undertake, adventures which were in manifest disharmony with the spirit of the Gospel: crusades, imperial and colonialist expeditions, inquisition and "the secular arm." Even today there are Christians who hanker after the old "Christendom," and seek the establishment of "Christian" political parties, like the Christian Democrats in Italy. In the Middle East, too, there are traces of the past, when Christians lived in a Muslim empire, in the system of *tawa'if* (politico-religious communities directed by the hierarchy: so the Maronites, the Melchites, the Chaldeans, grouped under a Patriarch). The inconveniences of this system today are obvious. Until quite recent times, the ideal Christian situation put forward in official documents was still that of a State religion. In the Encyclical *Immortale Dei*, of 1885, Leo XIII condemned secularism and praised official Catholic states in which Church and State are united "like soul and body" (Denzinger, 3168).

Vatican II marked a decisive return to the spirit of the Gospel. This is especially evident in the Decree on Religious Liberty, which recognized that "the people of God" has sometimes behaved in a way which hardly agreed with the evangelical spirit, and was even in manifest opposition to that spirit. It demands the independence of the Church vis-à-vis the political power, and vice versa, and recommends that they co-operate on problems which concern them both (13,4-7). It also claims the right to act on society according to the ideal of the Gospel.¹⁰

c) Life In This World And In The Next

The resurrection of Jesus Christ ushers in "the last times." Eternal life has already begun. "Eternal life is knowing you, the one true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ" (Jn 17,3; cf. 3,15-16; 5,24; 6,40,47). "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11,25; cf 5,24; 1 Jn 3,14; Rom 6,5).

Eternal life has begun, but it is not yet complete. The Christian lives in tension between the "already here" and "not yet come." For the promises of resurrection have not been fulfilled simply in the resurrection of Jesus and in Christian faith. It still remains to transform the world to bring it into conformity with the spirit of the Gospel, to bring the Kingdom of God onto the earth, this Kingdom being, for Christian faith, the consummation of the destiny of man and of the world.

The perfect accomplishment of the promises of resurrection will only be realized at the return of Christ, that is, at the Parousia, which will mark the end of the world, of time and of history. From this event there will be born, not another world, but this world renewed, the same world in which we live, with the same persons that live in it, but definitively transformed and completed. This is the object of Christian hope, its "Utopia" (in the positive sense); in this they find the world's meaning and dynamism, in time and in history. It remains, however, a realistic "Utopia," for the Christian realizes that whatever be the improvements in man and in the world, they must remain imperfect until the Parousia. (The Marxist "Utopia" is unrealistic, for it claims to bring the world to perfection within the limits of space and time.)

Thus, Christian faith demands total commitment to the service of the world to bring it into harmony with the Gospel and thus to its proper destiny. "Time is the fabric out of which eternity is woven." Commitment to human welfare is required by the Gospel. It can take various forms: perhaps involvement with a political party which is considered to

be the best reflection of the Gospel ideal, in cooperation with non-Christians and unbelievers; a trade-union activity; or social service of one kind or another. The contemplative life also remains as a possible option, for this form of life is an indispensable dimension of the full human life. At the same time, the Gospel can never be considered identical with any political program, and the Christian commitment involves a critical stance towards any political or social system, as well as towards the Church itself and the people who constitute the Church.¹¹

4. Possible Answers To The Questions

a) On Body And Soul

Recognize the unity of man, with its advantages and disadvantages, the importance of the body, and the respect due to it, the importance of sexuality, its positive value and its dangers.

b) On Religion And State

Examine together the advantages and disadvantages of a "State" religion. Frank recognition of the abuses, and the betrayals of the Gospel in Christian history, while noting their historical context. Invite criticism from both sides of our common history. Look together for a better system in our contemporary world, to encourage a vigorous faith, religious freedom, mutual tolerance or, even better, mutual understanding, and a better service to humanity.

It would be useful to use the Arabic translation of the great texts of Vatican II on the question of Church and State (Religious Liberty, *Gaudium et Spes*), and also of *Populorum Progressio*.¹²

c) On This World And The Next World

Agree on the meaning of eschatology. Faith in the next world must not lead to indifference and withdrawal in the face of the problems of this world. On the contrary, it should lead to commitment to the service of our fellowmen, especially those who are less fortunate. It should strengthen our hope and our eagerness to work for a better world, while at the same time preventing us from identifying human projects with the Kingdom of God, towards which these projects tend, and which they reflect in part, but which they can never totally realize. The end of time will bring also the Last Judgment. There, justice will be done. Men will be judged according to their works (Qur'an and Gospel), and especially

according to their attitude towards their fellowmen. Respect "the rights of God" (*huqûq al-insân*). The Second Vatican Council invites Muslims and Christians to collaborate to promote social justice for all men, and to protect moral values, peace and freedom (*Nostra Aetate*, 3).

FOOTNOTES

1. For a more complete study of the different trends existing in modern theology about non-Christian religions, see J. Gelot, "*Vers une théologie Chrétienne des Religions non-Chrétiennes*," in *Islamochristiana*, no. 2 (1976) pp. 1-57. (This review is published once a year by the Pontifical Institute of Arabic Studies, Rome.)
2. *Nova et Vetera*, 42 (1967) pp. 137-135.
3. See "*la révélation du Père et de L'Esprit*," *Cahiers de la Tourette* no.8 (1974), L'Abresle.
4. Extract taken from E.C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India* (Bombay: S. Chand and Co., reprinted 1964) p.38.
5. "Islam and Dialogue," *Encounter*, nos. 11-12 (Jan-Feb. 1975) pp. 8-9.
6. See comments about *walad*, p.14 above.
7. See Christian Duquoc, *Christologie II*, "Le Messie" (Paris: Cerf. 1972) 171-226; briefly summarized in *Cahiers Bleus* (L'Arbresle) No. 7, *Jésus sauveur II*, 20-22.
8. See, for example, the editorial of the Tunisian newspaper *Al-'amal* on the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, translated in *Etudes Arabes*, IPEA, 16 (1967/II), pp. 76-78.
9. French translation by L. Bercher in *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* (1933/III and 1934/II).
10. See also the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), 34-36,76; the Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops, 19-20.
11. See J. Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*; J.B. Metz, *Pour une théologie du Monde* (Paris: Cerf, 1971).
12. On the Conference in Tripoli, see 1 "Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Libya," *Encounter*, no.22 (Feb. 1976).

II. THE STATEMENT OF THE SECOND BISHOPS' INSTITUTE FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS (BIRE II) OF THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

Introduction

1. The participants from the Episcopal Conferences of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand came together 13-20 November, 1979, at the Residence of the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, in the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA II), sponsored by the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

2. The purpose of this colloquium was to deepen our understanding of and commitment to dialogue with Muslims. The intention of our meeting was pastoral. We approached our subject in three steps:

1. A reading of the situation — reports on the dialogue with Muslims in the various countries represented and the difficulties encountered.
2. Theological reflection on the nature and role of dialogue in Christian life.
3. Pastoral orientations and specific recommendations.

A READING OF THE SITUATION

3. Since the Second Vatican Council's call for Catholics to dialogue with Muslims, we see a picture of multiple openings and considerable advance, side by side with frustrations and failures. Certain shared attitudes towards life in our modern world have encouraged dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

4. Christians and Muslims share an eagerness to serve the one God, await His judgment and hope in His eternal reward. Both search for true moral values in the midst of a fast-changing world, and endeavor to apply them to the complex demands of daily life. Both are committed to the establishment of a more just and human social order. Christians and Muslims can see one another as servants of God striving to bear witness to His sovereignty and to carry out His will for men in the midst of modern forms of idolatry (consumerism, egoism) and godlessness (materialism, atheistic ideologies).

5. A further encouragement for dialogue between Christians and Muslims is that both are involved in a religious renewal of their own, by

which they hope to realize more deeply the divine message in which they believe. This renewal process may help them overcome the enmity and suspicion that have often existed between them. Christians and Muslims today are challenging themselves to center their attention on the divine message at the heart of their faith. Those who sincerely seek the will of God should come closer in love to one another.

6. Despite these factors which bring Christians and Muslims closer together, both groups must be aware of negative attitudes and situations which inhibit and present obstacles to dialogue. Predominant among these is fear — fear of a minority group towards a majority, of the politically or economically disadvantaged towards those in the position of strength, fear of being proselytized, as well as nameless and irrational fears based on centuries of strife, prejudice and ignorance of the other's religion.

7. A second factor inhibiting dialogue is a triumphalist attitude still present on both sides. Many Christians and Muslims consider themselves superior to all others and feel that they have nothing to learn from any partners in dialogue. Such an attitude makes impossible any true dialogue, which presupposes attitudes of humility, openness and equality as persons, without sacrificing one's religious identity.

8. The political implications of religious questions hinder dialogue in many Asian countries. Islam and Christianity have a genuine interest in influencing every aspect of man's life. Neither of them can ignore the political, economic and social surroundings in which man lives. Only in an atmosphere of mutual trust can the participants in dialogue find the patience and forbearance necessary to continue their exchange in the face of political issues which often arise.

9. In spite of these obstacles, there is a growing awareness on the part of Christians for the necessity of dialogue as an activity intrinsic to the Christian response to God's message.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

10. From all eternity God has spoken His message to mankind, to make the power of His word rule over the individual and social life of man. This eternal message of God became incarnate in Jesus, who announced the Good News of God's reign in this world.

11. The Church, the sacrament of God's message in the world,

continues Christ's work of dialogue. Her duty is always to proclaim the reign of God, to bring the proclamation of this message into every aspect of human life, and to seek the fulfilment of all things in Christ. The Church is particularly concerned with man's religious experience, the motivating and leavening agent in his culture. This means that the Church must constantly be involved in dialogue with men of other religions.¹ The Christian finds himself continually evangelizing and being evangelized by his partners in dialogue.²

12. Christians believe that God's saving will is at work, in many different ways, in all religions. It has been recognized since the time of the apostolic Church, and stated clearly again by the Second Vatican Council,³ that the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church.⁴ God's saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person. His grace may lead some to accept baptism and enter the Church, but it cannot be presumed that this must always be the case. His ways are mysterious and unfathomable, and no one can dictate the direction of His grace.

13. The purpose of the Church's proclaiming the message of Christ — which is its central mission — is to call man to the values of the Kingdom of God. We find such values also present in Islam. In dialogue, therefore, a Christian hopes that both he and his Muslim brother will turn anew to God's Kingdom, their own faiths richer by their mutual interchange, their mission to the world more fruitful by their shared insights and commitments.

PASTORAL ORIENTATIONS

Dialogue with Muslims

14. **Dialogue of Life.** Christians living among Muslims should recognize the importance of dialogue with their Muslim brethren. For most Christians, this means what can be called a dialogue of life. This is the most essential aspect of dialogue, and it is accomplished by Christians and Muslims living together in peace. Each gives witness to the other concerning the values he has found in his faith, and through the daily practice of brotherhood, helpfulness, open-heartedness and hospitality, each shows himself to be a God-fearing neighbor. The true Christian and Muslim offer to a busy world values arising from God's message when they revere the elderly, conscientiously rear the young, care for the sick and the poor in their midst, and work together for social

justice, welfare and human rights. We encourage Christians to be ever more deeply involved in this dialogue of life.

15. Formal Dialogue. This also has its place in the relationship between Christians and Muslims. When they come together for this purpose they must do so in attitudes of humility and openness. They should direct their attention to the issues that confront believers who have a special mission to their societies, and share the experiences that arise from their own religious heritage. From such common roots, Christians and Muslims can search together for solutions to the pressing needs of our nations and our world.

16. Theological Dialogue. Scholarly dialogue also has a special role. In this work the real differences which exist between Christianity and Islam must be acknowledged, but these differences must not be exaggerated or distorted. This attempt to clarify misunderstandings and to delineate the areas of convergence and divergence between Christianity and Islam is a goal of formal, theological dialogue. Irreconcilable theological differences need never be an obstacle to dialogue.

17. Education for Dialogue. Many Christians feel they know very little about Islam, and thus find it difficult to understand the practices and ideals of Muslims. Christian parents, catechists and educators should teach their children about God's love for Muslims and about the many good and holy values in the Islamic religion. Basic knowledge about the beliefs and practices of Muslims, taken from reliable and objective sources, should form a part of Catholic catechetical training. Education about Islam should give an unbiased presentation of the religion of Muslims, while at the same time avoiding any tendencies towards indifferentism. While firm in their commitment to Christ, Christians must respect the beliefs and practices of Muslims.

18. The Role of Bishops. Bishops living in areas where there are Muslims should try to present an example to their people by their knowledge of the teachings of Islam and by fostering cordial and open relations with Muslim leaders. Bishops are urged to provide training for priests, brother and sisters, and lay leaders so that they have understanding and respect for Islam. Bishops' Conferences should also send individuals for specialized training at established institutes, with a view towards their working as animators in their respective countries.

19. Ecumenical Dimensions. Catholics must not forget the ecumenical aspect of this dialogue. In a number of countries, Christians

of other denominations have preceded Catholics in the area of dialogue with Islam. Catholics are encouraged to co-operate with other Christians in common projects and in sharing resources. Catholic Bishops' Conferences could give leadership to Catholics in this matter by working together with national Councils of Churches.

CONCLUSION

20. What the participants of BIRA II are calling for is dialogue. This means a change of attitude towards Islam. In the past, the attitude of Christians towards Muslims has not always followed the example of love given by their teacher and savior, Jesus Christ. We exhort Catholics in Asia to let their lives be guided by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.⁵

“Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom.”

The Participants of BIRA II wish God's blessings upon their Muslim brethren on this first day of the new Islamic century.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
2. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 13.
3. St. Justin Martyr attributed all truths in non-Christian religions to the Word of God (Christ). St. Gregory Nazianzen, at the funeral oration of his father who was converted just before his death, said: “Even before he entered our fold, he was one of us. Just as many of our own are not with us because their lives alienate them from the common body of the faithful, in like manner many of those outside are with us, insofar as by their way of life they anticipate the faith and only lack in name what they possess in attitude.”

Vatican Council II, in line with Scripture and Tradition, teaches:

“We ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). In *Lumen Gentium*, 16 the Council Fathers say: “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these there are the Muslims....”

4. *Redemptor Hominis*, 6.

5. *Nostra Aetate*, 3.

III. A SHORT ISLAMIC BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR CHRISTIAN LIBRARIES

This brief bibliography is offered as a list of books on Islam which could form the basis of an Islamic collection in libraries of seminaries, catechetical centers and research institutes. This list has been limited to works in English. Those desiring works in French are referred to the bibliographical notes in the *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin* (74) Sept. – Oct., 1978, pp. 3-11. A more complete bibliography in English has been prepared by Rev. Christian Troll, S.J., in the *Guidelines for Dialogue between Muslims and Christians* (Indian Edition) Kerala: K.C.M. Press, 1979. This list has been kept deliberately small so that libraries with limited budgets can purchase a well-rounded collection. Wherever possible, the paperback editions are listed.

GENERAL INTRODUCTIONS

1. Gauhar, Altaf, ed. *The Challenge of Islam*. London: Islamic Council of Europe (Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH), 1978. This new collection of articles by Muslim scholars gives an excellent introduction to Islam. It has been well received by Muslims.
2. Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam*. New York: Anchor Books, 1968. Probably the best short introduction to Islam. However, it presupposes a basic knowledge of Islam, and some readers may find the contents rather technical.
3. Azzam, Abd al-Rahman. *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*. New York: Mentor Books, 1965. A fine treatment of modern issues by a prominent Muslim statesman.
4. Khurshid Ahmad, ed. *Islamic Perspectives*. London: The Islamic Foundation, 1979. (hardbound only). Collection of essays on the role of Islam in the modern state.
5. Nasr, Seyyid Hossein. *Ideals and Realities of Islam*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972. A worthwhile introduction by a Shi'i Muslim who is also a Sufi. It forms a balance to most introductions which are Sunni-oriented.
6. Tabatabai, Allamah. *Shi'ite Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975. The best in-depth account of Shi'i Islam from one of its great teachers. (hardbound only.)
7. Gibb, H.A.R. *Mohammedanism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1973. This well-accepted work by a non-Muslim is to be reprinted with a more acceptable title.... *Islam*.
8. Cragg, Kenneth. *The House of Islam*. Los Angeles: Dickenson Press, 1975. A good, brief introduction arranged as a study guide.

9. Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964. A thoughtful work, particularly interested in exploring the meaning of Islam for Christians.

THE QUR'AN

10. Pickthall, M.M. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. New York: Mentor Books. A standard English translation, closely paralleling the Arabic structure, but very poor and at times incomprehensible English. Not highly recommended.
11. Arberry, A.J. *The Koran Interpreted*. New York: Macmillan, 1973. Better English, but marred by archaisms and overly poetic language.
12. Irving, T.B., et al. *The Qur'an: Basic Teachings*. London: The Islamic Foundation, 1979. An excellent and highly recommended work. Not a complete translation of the Qur'an, but Qur'anic passages in readable English, arranged to present Qur'anic teaching. The principal translator, T.B. Irving, a native-English speaking Muslim, has prepared a complete translation of the Qur'an, which is forthcoming from the Librarie du Liban in Beirut.
13. Cragg, Kenneth. *The Mind of the Qur'an*, and *The Event of the Qur'an*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1973 and 1971. Perceptive studies of the Qur'an by a committed Christian.

MUHAMMAD

14. Watt, W.M. *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961. A shorter, more popular version of his magisterial works, *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina*.
15. Andrae, Tor. *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960. English trans., reprinted, from an influential 1932 biography of Muhammad.
16. Rodinson, Maxime. *Mohammed*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974. An extremely interesting Marxist interpretation of Muhammad's life and mission.

ISLAMIC HISTORY

17. *The Cambridge History of Islam*. 4 volumes. Cambridge UP, 1970 (paperback ed.). An important reference work.
18. Shaban, M.A. *Islamic History; 600-750*, and *Islamic History: 750-1055*. Cambridge UP, 1971, 1975. The best works on the early centuries of Islam.
19. Hodgson, M.G.S. *The Venture of Islam*. 3 volumes. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1974. An interesting effort to place Islamic history within the broader context of the civilizations of Asia-Africa-Europe. Its neologisms have disturbed some readers.
20. Smith, W.C. *Islam in Modern History*. New York: Mentor Books, 1959. Concentrates on the place of Islam in modern states since World War II.
21. Gibb, H.A.R. *Modern Trends in Islam*. New York: Octagon Books, 1978. A fine study of modernist movements and thinkers in Islam during the 20th century.

ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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23. Fakhry, Majid. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970. A serviceable survey of Islamic philosophy.
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