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Catholic Theological Perspectives on Islam at the Second Vatican Council

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On 20 October 1965, the Second Vatican Council (October. 1962 — December 1965), after many long discussions and emendations of the original text, promulgated a declaration on the relations of the Church with non-Christian religion. A part of the declaration was dedicated to Islam, marking the first time in history that the Church Magisterium had formulated an official position toward Islam as a major religion.[1] The texts of Vatican II concerning Islam consist of a single sentence in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and a full paragraph in the Declaration on the Relations of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. Several fundamental theological principles are said to be underlying the Church's approach to other religions: the universality of God's salvific will and the sacramental nature of the Church; and a third principle, lying between these two and connecting them, namely the necessary mediation of Jesus Christ.

The Origins of Statement on Islam at Vatican II

During the second session of the Council, the project of a text about Judaism was presented, the Catholic Oriental patriarchs and bishops living in Muslim countries asked for 'balance', in other words, that justice should be done not only to the reality of Judaism but also to Islam. Here the origins of *Nostra Aetate* are complex and still an open historical question. John XIII died on 3 June 1963 he was succeeded by the Archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini as Paul VI. The new pope had for a long time expressed an interest in ameliorating relations between Catholics and Jews, and so in 1960 he gave the task of preparing an initial document on Judaism to Augustin Cardinal Bea, a German Jesuit who had been at one time the rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and also

[1] For the commentary on the text concerning Islam, cf. R. Caspar pb, 'La religion musulmane', *Vatican II. Les relations de l'Église avec les religions non-chrétiennes*, Collection Unam Sanctam, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1966, pp. 201-36, 'L'Église et l'Islam à la lumiere du Concile', *Parole et Mission*, Vol. 34, 1966, pp. 453-473.

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the confessor of Pope Pius XII, and so a commission under the Secretariat for Unity was set up specifically to deal with this sensitive subject. In 1961 Cardinal Bea, while being interviewed by a journalist, mentioned that his secretariat was preparing a document which would have an end result of improving Catholic-Jewish relations.

In the era of difficult relations between the Arab and Islamic world and Judaism and the state of Israel, concerns began to be voiced in the Middle East that this state of affairs might possibly lead to a formal recognition of the Jewish state by the Vatican or that a reassessment of Zionism might be afoot. Observers at the time understood that this negative reaction in the Arab world, and especially some of the Eastern Catholic Patriarchs and some within the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, had a strong effect upon many within the curia and as a result the future of a major document on the Church's relationship to Judaism was very much in jeopardy.[2] At the same time controversy arose in connection with the projected document of the Catholic Church's relationship with Judaism, the commission became more and more aware that there was also a serious theological question involved, concerning where mention of the Jewish people or Judaism should actually be made; it seemed obvious that it could not be appropriately included in the Decree on Ecumenism, since the relationship of Catholicism to Judaism was fundamentally different from that which the Roman Church had with other Christian bodies. This was the argument of the Syrian Catholic Patriarch, Cardinal Tappouni, echoed by Stefanos I, the Coptic Catholic Patriarch of Alexandria, and Maximos IV, the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch.

Other Council fathers brought up the point that if the question of the church's relationship to Judaism was taken up then its relationship with other non-Christian religions should necessarily be discussed as well. It was clear that a definite impasse was arising between those who believed that the Jewish religion should have a unique position in a document all by itself and those who regarded a

[2] Karl Rahner also attests that it was an 'Arab lobby' that insisted that the document not treat of Judaism solely. Karl Rahner & Pinchas Lapide, *Encountering Jesus – Encountering Judaism: A Dialogue,* New York, Crossroads, 1987, p. 4. See also, John Oesterreicher, 'Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Introduction and Commentary', *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Edited by Herbert Vorgrimler & Karl Rahner, New York, Herder & Herder, 1969, Vol. 3, pp. 1-137. For an account of the policy of the Holy See to Jerusalem and the Middle East see, A.O'Mahony, 'The Vatican, Jerusalem, the State of Israel, and Christianity in the Holy Land', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 5, no 2. 2005, pp. 123-146; 'The Vatican, Palestinian Christians, Israel and Jerusalem: Religion, Politics, Diplomacy, and Holy Places, 1945-1950', *Studies in Church History: The Holy Land, Holy Lands, and Christian History* Vol. 36, 2000, pp. 358-374.

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treatment of Judaism in an official conciliar document as inopportune and detrimental to the apostolate and presence of the Church in the Muslim world.[3] Between the founding of the commission to draft a document in 1960 and its completion as a separate conciliar decree in 1964, there was a constant struggle not just over the details of the document but also over its very existence. When it finally appeared and was approved in November 1964, it included not only material on the Church's relationship with Judaism but also, albeit much shorter, sections on the Church's relationship to Islam and two other major world religions, Buddhism and Hinduism.

However, it would be too negative an evaluation to suggest that Nostra Aetate emerged solely in relation to a controversy over a document on the Catholic Church's relationship with Judaism. The theology which informed and grounded the conciliar document had been developing in the mind of Catholic thinkers for some decades, especially in such groups as the *Cercle du Saint Jean-Bapiste* and in the thought of Louis Massignon, Jean Daniélou SJ, and Jules Monchanin.[4]

It is well recording here, that the Council's concern with Islam arose incidentally, out of a desire for a declaration concerning the Jewish people. There was no intention of providing a full discussion of Islamic beliefs and practices, nor for that matter, of those of any other religion. Thus it is often been commented that the Second Vatican Council spoke about Muslims but not about Islam. This is true insofar as the Council did not intend to give a full description of Islam, entering into a comprehensive theological assessment of the tradition, for that the Council Fathers left open for a future consideration of the Church.

[3] Recognizing the sensitivity of the this issue, in his presentation of the text of Nostra Aetate to the general congregation on 25 September 1964, Cardinal Bea made a specific disclaimer that the sections of the document on Judaism were entirely of a religious and not a political nature, "So far as the Jewish people are concerned, it is necessary to say, again and again, that we do not treat here any political question whatever, but a purely religious question. We do not speak here of Zionism or of the political state of Israel', but of the followers of the Mosaic religion, wherever they live throughout the world", *Council Daybook: Vatican II, Session 3*, Edited by F.Anderson, Washington, National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965, pp. 62-63. For some observations on the religious and political context see, A.O'Mahony, '*Le pélerin de Jérusalem:* Louis Massignon, Palestinian Christians, Islam and the State of Israel', *Palestinian Christians: Religion, Politics and Society*, Edited by, A. O'Mahony (London: Melisende, 1999, pp.166-189.

[4] See the important studies by Françoise Jacquin, 'Prière trinitaire et expérience hindouiste: la voie ouverte par Jules Monchanin', *La vie spirituelle*, no 727, 1998, pp 247-254; 'L'abbé Monchanin et l'Islam', *Islamochristiana* (Rome), Vol. 23, 1997, pp 27-42; 'Louis Massignon et l'abbé Monchanin', *La vie spirituelle*, no 694, 1991, pp 175-183; *Histoire du Cercle Saint Jean-Bapiste. L'enseignement du père Daniélou*, Paris, Éditions Beauchesne, 1987.

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Muslim belief as presented in *Lumen Gentium*

The demand for the inclusion of Islam in the conciliar documents issued in two relatively short but important and decisive texts. Although they are primarily concerned with the Catholics' practical attitude towards Muslims, they imply elements of a fresh Catholic theological view of Islam. Number 16 of the 'Dogmatic constitution on the Church' *Lumen Gentium* declares:

> 'But the plan of salvation also embraces those who acknowledge the Creator, and among these the Muslims are first; they profess to hold the faith of Abraham and along with us they worship the one merciful God who will judge humanity on the last day.'[5]

The study of the proceedings of the Council makes it clear that it did not want to state an objective link between Islam, Ishmael and the biblical revelation. The reference to Abraham is put on the subjective level: 'they profess. . .'.

Some decades before the Council there were influential currents in Catholic thought which attempted to reconcile Islam and Abraham in Christian theology. Louis Massignon (1883-1962), Islamicist who having recovered his own Christian faith through contact with Islam devoted his life to presenting the faith of Islam to the West. He was no theologian and never systematized his thought but presented it in flashes of an intuitive nature.[6] His position has been summarized as:

> "Islam, according to Massignon, is the heir of Hagar and Ishmael, the 'excluded', driven into the desert but enjoying a special blessing (Gen. 16: 11-20; 21: 17-20; 25: 12-18). Muhammad receives this blessing of Ishmael 'at the providential and symbolic hour': exiled from his homeland, Mecca, like Abraham from Ur and Ishmael driven into the desert, he claims inheritance of Abraham against Israel (the Jewish people) unfaithful to their Covenant and against the Christians unfaithful to Jesus".[7]

[5] Norman Tanner sj., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, London/Washington, Sheed/Georgetown, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 861. Some Islamic opinion object to the statement of *Lumen Gentium* – 'with us they worship the one merciful God'; as there are Muslims who attack the Christian claim to monotheism. The origins of this might be that in the Qur'an contains a reference to a Trinity consisting God, Jesus and Mary (Q 5:116). Christians may reply that the Qur'an is denying a false Trinity; but they will still be considered by some Muslims to be *mushrikûn* (associators), *Kâfirûn* (unbelievers). This critique has roots in early Islam, where the question of the unity or diversity of the polytheistic world is discussed; see Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 76-80.

[6] A.O'Mahony, 'Our Common Fidelity to Abraham is What Divides': Christianity and Islam in the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon', *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, Edited by A.O'Mahony & Peter Bowe osb, Leominister, Gracewing, 2006.

[7] Robert Caspar pb, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology*, Rome, Pontifico Istiuto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998, p. 97; and Sidney H.Griffith: Sharing the Faith

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Islam's role is thus, as it were, to goad Jews and Christians to return to the correct understanding of their own religions. It could be considered almost as an:

> "Abrahamic schism, prior to the Ten Commandments, the foundation of Judaism and to Pentecost, the foundation of Christianity".[8]

According to Louis Massignon's 'theological' vision, Muhammad possessed the faith of Abraham, he did not experience mystic union, for the night when he was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence to heaven he stopped short of the Lotus of the Limit (Q 17:1; 53: 9-17). By abstaining from crossing the threshold and not daring to intercede for all sinners, he excluded himself from understanding the inner workings of the divine life. Hence the quranic denials of the Incarnation and Christ's death on the cross, Muslim faith, although authentic, therefore need to be completed by Christian charity. Nevertheless, in Massignon's view, it is evident from the live of Muslim saints the Holy Spirit is at work bringing about this completion from within Islam. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of al-Hallâj.[9] Massignon maintains that al- Hallâj death, in ecstatic participation in the Christ, summons Islam to admit the truth of the crucifixion. The rift between the three faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, will not finally be healed until Christ returns and, as Muslims themselves believe, Jerusalem once more becomes the direction of prayer (in early Islam, the *qiblah*, was towards Jerusalem). In the meantime, the Qur'an may be regarded as a truncated Arab Bible, the scriptural rule of the 'Abrahamic schism', and

of Abraham: the 'Credo' of Louis Massignon, *Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations*, Vol.8, no.2, 1997, pp. 193-210.

[8] Robert Caspar pb, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology*, Rome, Pontifico Istiuto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998, p. 98.

[9] Al-Hallâj was executed in Baghdad in 922 having scandalized the authorities by claiming to have achieved union with God and uttering the words 'anâ al-haqq' [I am the Truth]. He went to the gibet willingly, declaring God's love to the last. Massignon set out to proved beyond reasonable doubt not only that al-Hallâj was innocent of heresy, but also that his miracles and mystical experiences were as well-documented as those of any Christian saint in his classic work, *La Passion d'al-Hosayn-ibn Mansour al-Hallâj, martyre mystique de l'Islam* Paris: Geuthner, 1922, First Edition, 2 Vols. Massignon continued to work on a new edition of this work until his death in 1962. After his death, the new edition was assembled by a group of scholars working together with the Massignon family and friends, which was published as: *La Passion de Husayn ibn Mansur Hallâj, martyre mystique de l'Islam* Paris: Gallimard 1975, Second Edition, 4 Vols. The second edition was translated into English by Herbert Mason, *The Passion of al-Hallâj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, Bollingen Series XCVIII. Princeton University Press, 1982, 4 Vols. Roger Arnaldez, 'Hallâj et Jèsus dans le pensèe de Louis Massignon', *Horizons maghrébins. Louis Massignon. Hommes de dialogue des cultures*, no. 14-15, 1989, pp. 171-178. Massignon in a place close to Baghdad had a conversion experience to Christianity 'via Islam', Ian Latham, 'Louis Massignon and Iraq', forthcoming.

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given the conditional authority conceded to the decisions of the anti-popes.[10]

Massignon, who died shortly before the opening of the Second Vatican Council, certainly helped to bring about a new vision of Islam in Catholic circles though his own position, was not adopted by the conciliar texts.[11]

The figure of Abraham is a controversial figure in the encounter for Christianity and Islam. [12] Some two hundred and forty-five verses in twenty-five sûras of the Qur'an make reference to Abraham (Ibrâhîm), the progenitor of the nation of Israel. Among the biblical figures, only Moses[13] receives more attention in the Qur'an. Abraham and Moses are the sole prophets explicitly identified as bearers of scriptures (Q. 53: 36-7; 87: 18-9). Although the Islamic Abraham shares many characteristics with the figure in the Bible and later Jewish exegetical literature, the Qur'an especially emphasizes his rôle as a precursor of Muhammad and the establisher of the pilgrimage rites in Mecca.[14]

For Jews Abraham's special covenantal relationship with God established him as the authenticator and founder of Judaism. It was natural that when Christianity established itself as related but independent of Judaism, Christians would associate with the figure of Abraham (Rom. 4:9-25; 9:7-9; Ga 421-31).[15] Similarly, Abraham's role in the Qur'an includes a related but more polemical aspect as he appears as neither a Jew nor a Christian but as a *Hanif muslim* (Q 3:65-70). Like the New Testament citations, the Qur'an stipulates that the divine covenant established with Abraham does not

[10] Neal Robinson, 'Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 2, no.2, 1991, pp. 182-205.

[11] Massignon's vision of Islam as an Abrahamic religion was popularized by several of his devotees. The Maronite priest Youakim Moubarac, in his remarkable, controversial doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne tried to prove that the message of the Qur'an right from its inception centered on the figure of Abraham, *Abraham dans le Coran. L'histoire dans le Coran et la naissance de l'Islam,* Paris, Vrin, 1958.

[12] Y. Moubarac, 'Abraham en Islam', *Cahiers sioniens:* '*Abraham, père des croyants*', Vol. V, no. 2, 1951, pp. 104-120.

[13] Y. Moubarac, 'Moïses dans le Coran', *Cahiers Sioniens,* '*Moïses, l'homme de l'alliance*', Vol. 8, no.2-3-4, 1954, pp. 373-393.

[14] One series of Abraham references in the Qur'an finds no parallel in either the Bible or later Jewish traditions. These associate Abraham, and often Ishmael, with the building of the Ka'ba, with Arabian cultic practice and with terminology of Islamic religious conceptions. Reuven Firestone, 'Abraham's association with the Meccan sanctuary and the pilgrimage in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods', *Le Muséon*, Vol. 104, 1991, pp. 365-393; *Journeys in Holy Lands: The evolution of the Abramic-Ishmael Legends*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990. Emilio Platti OP, 'Le sacrifice en Islam', *Le sacrifice dans les religions*, Ed. M.Neusch, Paris, Éditions Beauchesne, 1994, pp. 157-174. See the account given by Reuven Firestone, 'Abraham', in: *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Vol. 1, pp. 5–11.

[15] Jean Daniélou sj, 'Abraham dans la tradition chrétienne', *Cahiers sioniens:* '*Abraham, père des croyant*s', Vol. V, no. 2, 1951, pp. 69-87.

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automatically include all his progeny (Q 2:124; 4:54-5; 37: 113; 57:26). In as much as the religion of Muhammad is the religion of Abraham (Q 22:78), those Jews who reject Muhammad and the religion he brings are, in fact, rejecting their own religion. The Jews further deny the religious sanctity of Mecca, despite Abraham's intimate association with it (Q 3:95-8) as outlined in the Islamic tradition.

Abraham in Islam also has a defining rôle in the abrogation (*naskh*) of Judaism and Christianity. Muslim tradition maintains that diversity of religions has been the hallmark of human society for a very long time, but it had not been its primordial condition.[16] We can learn from this that according to the Islamic tradition Islam is not only the historical religion and institutional framework, which was brought into existence by the Muslim prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, but also the primordial religion of mankind, revealed to Adam at the time of his creation. This is intimately related to the conception that Adam was a prophet, and to the notion that Abraham/Ibrâhîm was a Muslim in a metahistorical sense. At a certain stage in their development, however, Judaism and Christianity deviated from their pristine condition and became hopelessly corrupt (*Tahrif*), especially in the scriptural transmission. A prophetic mission would have been required to ameliorate this situation. However, no prophets were sent to accomplish this task between the missions of Jesus and Muhammad and, consequently, true religion ceased to exist. Only with the emergence of Islam in the seventh century, the situation was transformed.

Thus throughout the centuries since the rise of Islam, Muslim/Christian relations have revolved around this double axis of familiar, biblical appeal and strenuous, religious critique. It was against this background that the Church Fathers at the Second Vatican Council sought to give account of Islam.

Both texts of Vatican II link Islamic faith with Abraham. *Lumen Gentium* says that Muslims 'profess to hold the faith of Abraham'. *Nostra Aetate* states that Muslims submit to God 'just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own'. It must be admitted that these references to Abraham remain somewhat vague. Abraham's faith is recognized, but it is not said how he exemplified this faith. Muslims see Abraham as a

[16] For an understanding of the Qur'an as scripture and the quranic view of religion see the work of Guy Monnot OP, 'Le corpus coranique', *La formation des canons scripturarires,* Ed, M.Tardieu, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1993, pp. 61-73; 'L'ideé de religion et son evolution dans le Coran', *The Notion of Religion in Comparative Research,* Ed, U.Bianchi, Rome, L'Erma di Brettschneider, 1994, pp. 97-102. I am indebted to the account given by Jane Dammen McAulitte, 'The Abrogation of Judaism and Christianity in Islam: a Christian Perspective', in: *Concilium*, no. 3, 1994, pp. 116–122; and Y. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition,* Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 16–17.

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champion of monotheism and attribute to him the rebuilding of the Ka'ba, the shrine in Mecca that has become the direction of Muslims' prayer. Christians insist on Abraham's response to God's call to leave his country for a promised land. By both religions Abraham is given as a model of submission to God's mysterious decrees. There is silence above all on the question of descent from Abraham. Quite apart from the historical question of the descent of the Arabs from Abraham through Ishmael, a question which remains disputed, the silence on this point is quite consistent with the Christian position with regard to Abraham. Physical descent is unimportant; it is faith that counts. [17] As long as there is a readiness to respect the different interpretations, the figure of Abraham provides common ground for the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which can be called with some justification 'Abrahamic religions', though this term does not describe them very adequately or completely, and in some circumstances misleading.[18]

Islam in the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*

The second text of the Council is longer and more substantial. It constitutes paragraph three of the 'Declaration of the Church's relation to the non-Christian religions' *Nostra Aetate* in which were put together the schemata about Judaism, Islam and the other religions. The declaration begins with the assurance that the Catholic Church regards her Muslim brothers 'with esteem'. It proceeds to detail the essential elements of Islamic doctrine, stressing those features that are common to the two religions; for example, Muslims are conceded to 'adore the one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth'. Further, without actually accepting the revealed character of the Qur'an the declaration observes that Muslims recognize that God 'has spoken to men', and affirms that Muslims are anxious to submit themselves with all their souls to God's decrees even though the decrees be hidden, just as Abraham, 'with whom the Muslim faith is pleased to associate itself', submitted himself to them.

A radical divergence, however, is Christ: 'They [Muslims] venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him

[17] On Abraham, see, R. Caspar pb, 'Abraham in Islam and Christianity, *Encounter: documents for Christian-Muslim understanding*, no. 92,1996, pp. 1-17; Jean-Louis Ska sj, 'Abraham dans le Coran ou le prototype du, "musulman', *Abraham et ses hôtes. Le patriarche et les croyants au Dieu unique*, Bruxelles, Éditions Lessius, 2001, pp. 61-84. Jean-Louis Ska sj, 'Abramo nella tradizione musulmana', La Civiltà Cattolica, No. 3617, 2001, pp. 497-484.

[18] Michael L.Fitzgerald pb, 'From Heresy to Religion: Islam since Vatican II', *Encounter: documents for Christian-Muslim understanding*, no. 296, 2003, pp. 1-13.

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as God'. Reference is made to the exalted place occupied by Mary in Muslim doctrine: 'They honour his virgin mother Mary and even sometimes devoutly call on her'. Concerning the last things, eschatology: 'They await the day of judgment when God will require all people back to life'. A brief allusion is made to Muslim morality: 'They have regard for the moral life and worship God especially in prayer, almsgiving, and fasting'. The radical novelty of the declaration is obvious.

The Council document states in full:

> 'The Church also looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him as God, and they honour his virgin mother Mary and even sometimes devoutly call upon her. Furthermore they await the day of judgement when God will require all people brought back to life. Hence they have regard for the moral life and worship God especially in prayer, almsgiving and fasting. [19]

Two characteristics of this text are immediately evident: first, it highlights the common or related points between Islam and Christianity, noting at the same time the essential difference: the Christian profession of the divinity of Jesus. Second, it opens up the possibility of collaboration between the two religions, at the service of the most pressing needs of contemporary humanity.[20]

According to the schema worked out by Emilio Platti OP, we will find out that every sentence of this text is an implicit reference to verses of the Qur'an:[21]

> "...the Muslims. They worship the one God, living and subsistent..."
> Q. 2, 255: "God! There is no god but He, the Living and subsistent...";
> "merciful and almighty..."
> Q. 26, 9: "Verily, your Lord is the Almighty, the Merciful";
> "the Creator of heaven and earth"
> Q. 6, 1: "Praise be to God, who created the heavens and the earth";
> "who has spoken to humanity"
> Q. 96, 5: "(God) taught man that which he knew not...".
> "They seek to submit themselves whole heartedly"
> Q. 87, 3.10: "(God) hath ordained by Decree and granted guidance

[19] Norman Tanner sj., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, London/Washington,Sheed/Georgetown, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 861. pp. 969-970.

[20] Robert Caspar, *Traité de Théologie Musulamne*, Rome, Pontifico Istiuto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1987, pp. 83-87.

[21] Emilio Platti OP, 'Islam: Dialogue or Confrontation?', *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. 37, no. 111, 2002, pp. 497-496, 487-488.

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(. . .). The admonition will be received by those who fear (God)";
"just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God"
Q. 2, 131: "(Abraham), his Lord said to him: Submit (a-sl-i-m); and he said: I submitted (a-sl-a-m-tu) to the Lord of the universe";
Q. 16, 120: "Abraham was indeed a model, obedient to God, a pure monotheist";
"They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him as God"
Q. 61, 6: "And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: (. . .) I am the Prophet (Rasûl) of God";
"they honour his virgin mother Mary and even sometimes devoutly call upon her"
Q. 19, 20.31: "She said: How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me". . .; "and He (God) hath made me blessed wheresoever I be".
"Furthermore they await the day of judgement when God will require all people brought back to life".
Q. 75, 1: "I call to witness the Day of the Resurrection"; Q. 1, 2.4: "Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds (. . .), Master of the Day of Judgment"
"Hence they have regard for the moral life and worship God especially in prayer, almsgiving and fasting".
Q. 9, 71: "The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers (Salât), practice almsgiving and obey God and His Prophet"; Q. 2, 183: "You who believe: fasting is prescribed to you. . .".

The opening sentence of the paragraph constitutes a unique statement and an absolutely new beginning insofar as it is an official declaration about Islam issued by the highest teaching authority of the Church.[22] John Paul II took up this theme on 19 August 1986, when addressing young Moroccans gathered in the Casablanca stadium, he did not hesitate to tell them: "We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who creates the worlds and brings the worlds to their perfection".[23] This is an indubitable affirmation of the existence of one and the same creator God. But one also has to add that Christians and Muslims who worship the same God have very different conceptions of God's unity. One could even say that the monotheism, which is a common heritage of all children of Abraham, has at the same time divided them for centuries.[24]

[22] This analysis owes much to Christian Troll SJ, 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam', *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid-20th century,* Edited by Jacques Waardenburg,Leuven, Peeters, 1998, pp. 23-27.

[23] 'The Speech of the Holy Father John Paul II to Young Muslims, Casablanca, Morroco, 19 August 1985' *Encounter: documents for Christian-Muslim understanding*, no. 128, 1986, pp. 1-12.

[24] One would do well to listen to the warning of Roger Arnaldez, "Hence, the problem of the diverse messages stubbornly remains. There is no way of reducing it to a common

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Muslims cannot accept Christian monotheism as Trinitarian monotheism, and that is a direct consequence of their rejection of the divine Sonship of Jesus. So we should remember how by its radical nature, Islamic monotheism differs from Christian monotheism, and note that in Muslim eyes the sin par excellence, that of idolatry, is committed not only by pagan polytheists but also by Christians themselves.[25]

Muslims and Christians, whilst they adore together the one God, do not always give him the same 'names', nor do they give the same meaning to apparently similar 'names'. Therefore the Council mentions explicitly some of these 'names', those especially important to Islam, mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an, and common to both religions. An annotation to the text of the Council refers to the letter of Pope Gregory VII to Al-Nasir, the eleventh-century amir of Mauritania, where the Pope greets the amir as his 'brother in Abraham' and as a believer in God, One and Creator.[26]

Although the Council refused to add 'through the prophets' to the phrase 'who has spoken to humanity',[27] because of the ambiguity of the reference to the prophets, who are not always the same, do not always have the same 'face' nor play the same role,[28] in Is-

core so long as we situate ourselves within one of the three religious families. [Judiasm, Christianity, Islam] One must be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, adhering to a faith that excludes the other two. If we want to extract some monotheism-in-itself, a monotheistic theology or morality as such, we must simultaneously depart from the three monotheistic religions and place ourselves outside or above them. To put it most forcefully, we would have to neglect the particularities of their messages, ignore the characteristics of each, and repress the very notion of a Messenger". *Three Messengers for One God*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, p.3

[25] Robert Caspar, 'The Permanent Significance of Islam's Monotheism, *Concilium*, no. 177, 1985, pp. 67-78; Samir Khalil Samir sj, 'L'Unicite absolue de Dieu: regards sur la pensee chretienne arabe', *Lumiere et Vie*, no. 163, 1983, pp. 35-48.

[26] The letter was written in AD 1076. See C. Courtois, "Grégoire VII et l'Afrique du Nord", in *Revue Historique*, T.CXCV (1945), p.97-122; 193-226.

[27] The Qur'an teaches in Islamic tradition that prophets have been sent by God to all peoples giving the same guidance and warning. As a result all the prophets recognized in the Qur'an are accorded equal status. Muhammad is regarded as the 'Seal of the Prophets' because Muslims believe that his teaching has been preserved without corruption. He is given the title '*rasul*' or 'the one whom God sends' and this reflects the Muslim belief that the scriptures were given to him as a universal revelation. Every community has received a '*rasul*', but Muhammad was sent to a people who had not previously received one. Muslims regard a '*rasul*' (prophets such as Noah, Moses or Jesus) as being free from sin. See Jacques Jomier OP, 'The Idea of the Prophet in Islam', *Bulletin: Secretariatus pro non-Christianis* (rome), no. 18, 1971, pp. 149-163.

[28] One of the essential differences between Islam and Christianity is that of their understanding of the revelation from God and therefore a major difficulty is in Christian-Muslim dialogue is the fact that while Muslims accept Jesus as a genuine prophet and messenger of God, Christians do not accord the same status to Muhammad. See Jacques Jomier OP, 'The Problem of Muhammad', *How to Understand Islam*, London, SCM Press, 1989, pp. 140-148. Maurice Borrmans pb, in Louis Gardet & J.Cuoq pb, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, Rome, Ancona, 1969, states, "Christians are inclined to perceive that Muhammad was agreat literary, political and religious genius, and he possesses

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lam and Christianity.[29] This phrase is of the greatest importance as to Christian qualification of the Muslim faith: the Muslim faith does not relate to a God invented by human reason. Muslim faith relates to the transcendent God who has made himself known by his Word entrusted to humanity, to the prophets — even if this is not the same Word nor are they the same prophets as for the Christian faith.

The Muslim faith is essentially *islâm,* active submission to the Will of God, to 'whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly'. Thus is noted the 'mysterious' aspect which this faith comprises: reasonable without being rational, in line with the Qur'an which demands of the believer the acceptance of the will of God, even if it appears paradoxical to the eyes of reason. It is as type and model of this faith of submission that Abraham finds his true role in the Muslim faith.

Jesus and Mary are among the most venerated persons in the Qur'an. The text indicates the refusal to see in Jesus more than a great prophet. This will be taken positively by Muslims who glory in this refusal which is born from the desire to respect the transcendence of God. Mary is also respected as the virgin mother of Jesus according to Islam, which has never hesitated on this point.

Muslim eschatology is briefly indicated. The resurrection of the body and the judgement which follows it are one of the essential points of the Muslim and the Christian faith. The modalities and the criteria of this judgement can differ from one theology to the other. It remains that, according to the Qur'an as well as according to the Gospel, everyone will be judged by their actions and that, for the

particular qualities which enabled him to lead multitudes to the worship of the true God. But, at the same time, they find in him evidence of mistakes and important misapprehensions. They also discern in him marks of prophethood", pp. 57-58. See also, 'Muhammad's Prophetic Office and the inspired nature of the Qur'an', Robert Caspar pb, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology*, Rome, Pontifico Istiuto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998, pp. 89-134.

[29] In an important interview entitled, '*Le Signe Marial*' given to a Catholic review in 1948, Louis Massignon, offered his most succinct theological account of Muhammad's prophethood. His primary focus seems to have been to defend Muhammad from the charge of being a false prophet. In definition Muhammad's authentic prophethood, however, he introduced a distinction between 'positive' and 'negative' prophecy which can easily mislead. Far from contrasting true and false prophecy he used between 'positive' and 'negative' to distinguish two attributes of authentic prophecy. Positive prophecy challenges and reverses human values which are prone to weakness and sin. While this accounts for much of Muhammad's ministry as social reformer, Massignon wanted to say more: that Muhammad was a negative prophet in the sense of bearing witness to 'the final separation of the good from the evil'. Negative prophecy is therefore an eschatological category in Massignon's thought, the ultimate concern of a negative prophet being to bear witness of the Last Day when God would disclose "the transcendent secret of the glory of the just God'. *Rythmes du Monde* (Paris), no. 3, 1948, pp. 7-16. see also, Guy Harpigny, 'Muhammad est-il considéré prophète?, *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, Vol. 6, 1975, pp. 311-323.

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Christian as well as for the Muslim, 'the world which comes from God, returns to God', to find there its fulfillment.

They have regard for the moral life' is the phrase that remained, after the Council had discussed a proposed, fuller text: 'for the moral life, individual as well as familial and social'. The Council refused to refer explicitly to family and social morality because of the Qur'an's passages on polygamy and repudiation and because of mainstream Islam's teaching on the essential link between the spiritual and the temporal and between religion and state.

Muslim religious practice is described by its three foremost manifestations: ritual prayer, the alms-tax and fasting. Of the profession of faith only its first part, the faith in the One God, was mentioned at the beginning of the text. The pilgrimage could have been mentioned but it is far from being practiced by all Muslims, and the Council did not intend in any way to present a complete exposition of Islam.

The document continues:

> 'Although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, this synod urges all parties that, forgetting part things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people.'[30]

The second part of the text concerns the present and future perspectives of understanding and collaboration between Christians and Muslims. The past of hatreds and wars must be forgotten, i.e. not ignored but overcome. Mutual understanding — objective and respectful — will require much effort and progress on both sides. But the dialogue itself must be surpassed in order to arrive at collaboration between believers towards one objective: to confront together the challenges of modern thought and civilisation, not only in order to save faith in God, especially among the young, but in order to make a sincere and committed faith contribute to saving our civilisation from the dangers accruing to it from neo-paganism and in order to construct together a better world.[31]

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the Council's statements regarding Islam, in the light of history represent a radical novelty. However, soon

[30] Norman Tanner SJ., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, London/Washington,Sheed/Georgetown, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 861. pp. 969-970.

[31] Robert Caspar pb, *Traité de Théologie Musulamne*, Rome, Pontifico Istiuto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1987, pp. 87

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after the closure of the Council, the Dominican scholar of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, George Anawati (1905-1994), in a critical analysis of these statements pointed out their remarkable silence regarding the figure of Abraham and Islam's, possible historical as well as, spiritual link with him through Ishmael and, above all, concerning Muhammad, and hence the prophetic character of Islam. In 1967, Anawati stated: 'One can say that the Declaration summarizes with a minimum of words Muslim *theodicy* but not what is essential to the Muslim *faith* of which the belief in the mission of Muhammad is one of the most important elements'.[32] The silence of the Council concerning the second part of the Muslim profession of faith (*shahâda*) doubtless represents the most sensitive point for the Muslims. The Council chose to deal with it by —silence.

What the Second Vatican council said on Islam can be summed up in the words of Robert Caspar:

"The Council affirms positively the minimum which is to be accepted, Islam is in the first rank of non-Christian monotheistic religions. If further studies concerning the theology of religions and in particular regarding the theological status of Islam allow one to say more, the Conciliar texts are not opposed"[33]

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[32] Georges Anawati OP, 'Exkurs zum Konzilstext über die Muslim', *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. Das Zwite Vatikanische Konzil, Frieburg, Herder, 1967, Vol. 2, pp. 485-487, quoted in Christian Troll SJ, 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam', *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid-20th century*, p.27. See also, G.Anawati, 'L'islam à l'heure du Concile. Prolégomènes à un dialogue islamo-chrétien', *Angelicum*, Vol. 41, 1964, pp. 145-166.

[33] R. Caspar pb, 'La religion musulmane', Vatican II. Les relations de l'Église avec les religions non-chrétiennes, p. 215.

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