

DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM

Ecclesiam Suam – Pushing out the Boat

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Abstract: I will touch on two issues in this paper: first, the meaning and ambiguity of the word 'dialogue' and how it has caused problems in actual interreligious 'dialogue' with Islam; and second, and more substantially, I shall offer some thoughts on the *doctrinal* achievements of *Ecclesiam Suam* and the Council's teachings on Islam and some subsequent developments. This is because I am convinced that the doctrinal achievements are central for mapping out the future possibilities of Catholic-Muslim dialogue. There are of course many other topics that one could speak of in Catholic-Muslim relations: most importantly the richness of spiritual exchange between these traditions;¹ or sadly, the murdering of each other in some parts of the world, or the denial of free practice of religion by Muslims towards Catholics and Christians in parts of the world, or happily, the remarkable socio-political cooperation between Catholics and Muslims when faced with pressing and often tragic social problems. But I will focus on the theological-doctrinal issues for the reason given.

Keywords: Catholic, Dialogue, *Ecclesiam Suam*, Magisterium, Muslim, Paul VI, Personalism.

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¹See the excellent survey until 2000: Michael Fitzgerald, "Christian Muslim Dialogue - A Survey of Recent Developments," 10 April 2000 <<http://sedosmission.org/old/eng/fitzgerald.htm>> and with some contentious exegesis of *Lumen Gentium*, but otherwise most helpfully: Douglas Pratt, "The Vatican in Dialogue with Islam: inclusion and engagement," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 21, 2010, 245-62.

1. Introduction

A number of Muslim writers have criticised 'dialogue' as taught by the Catholic Church.² Karrim Laham, after a sensitive analysis of *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Council documents, teachings by Pope John Paul II, and some Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue statements, argues that the post-Conciliar magisterium takes an ambiguous step backward. He charts "the significant intellectual shift of the Church from Scholasticism to Personalism" in the 1960's, both in Pope Paul's work and in the Council documents, which allowed dialogue to be construed as open-ended. This personalist shift meant that the 'other' would not be instrumentalized, seen as a means to some greater goal. Dialogue, openness, and greater understanding were the goal of dialogue. Laham argues that unfortunately the later magisterium 'ambiguously' links dialogue with mission.³

Why is this linking a problem? If mission is the goal, the implication for Laham is that the dialogue becomes a means to an end, which compromises personalist dialogue. Laham compares this later state of affairs to a situation where "the right hand should not know, or pretend not to know, what the left hand is doing."⁴ He is joined by other Muslim scholars such as Mahmoud Ayoub and Mahmut Aydin in criticising this linkage.⁵ This point is also echoed by Catholic writers engaged with Islam.⁶

²Karim Lahham, *The Roman Catholic Church's Position on Islam after Vatican II*, Tabah Papers Series, Number 2, Abu Dhabi: UAE, 2008.

³Lahham, *The Roman Catholic Church's Position*, 27, 26 respectively.

⁴Lahham, *The Roman Catholic Church's Position*, 26.

⁵Mahmoud Ayoub, "Pope John Paul on Islam," in *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999, 171–86, 174. Ayoub is critical of what he calls 'post-colonial proselytization' because in his view mission is incompatible with dialogue, and the Council spoke about 'dialogue'. Mahmut Aydin, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council*, Washington DC: Council for Research in Values & Philosophy, 2002, 46 makes a similar point about dialogue and mission. It is ironic that Muslim speakers do not take seriously the centrality of mission given Islam's

I am not convinced these criticisms are fair. What precisely is 'dialogue' for Paul VI and for the Council? Is there a change from open-endedness to mission oriented dialogue as Laham suggests? Anne Nolan's scholarly monograph on the use of the word 'dialogue' in Paul VI and the Council remains unsurpassed on this issue.⁷ Nolan shows that two Latin words, *colloquium* and *dialogus*, were both translated by the English word 'dialogue' which conflates and confuses two different conceptual worlds.⁸ The first is the more recent personalist concept of dialogue as an open-ended process between equal partners; and the second, the Thomistic dialectic concept that dialogue is geared towards arriving at an end point, which is truth, which for the scholastics is the Trinity.

Nolan suggests this ambivalence is present in *Ecclesiam Suam* and in the Council documents and is heightened by translations that use the single English word 'dialogue' to translate both Latin terms. Another of Nolan's conclusions is

own universalising missionary drive, sometimes understood within the concepts of *tabligh* (preaching) or *da'wa* (call). On this matter, see Henning Wrogemann, *Missionarischer Islam und gesellschaftlicher Dialog: Eine Studie zur Begründung und Praxis des Aufrufs zum Islam*, Verlag Otto Lembeck, Frankfurt, 2006.

⁶See Joseph Kenny OP, *Views on Christian-Muslim Relations*, Ch. 2, <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series02/IIA-13/chapter__two.htm> (18 May 2014); Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992, 187-88 speculates that Pope Paul VI had become wary of 'dialogue' in his later exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in part because he had come under the spell of Jean Danielou's work, who held that the world religions were always and only a human reaching out towards God. However, this view of religions was present in *Ecclesiam Suam* and earlier writings.

⁷Ann Michele Nolan, *A Privileged Moment: Dialogue in the Language of the Second Vatican Council 1962-65*, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006. See the helpful critical review of it by Anthony M Barratt, in *Heythrop Journal* 49.5, 2008, 889-890,; but he too agrees with the conclusions.

⁸She also finds fault with Tanner's otherwise excellent translation: Nolan, *Privileged Moment*, 191-93.

that *Ecclesiam Suam* and the Council documents always deploy *colloquium* and *dialogus* in the context of mission or in the context of the teaching role of the Church to the faithful and the world at large.⁹ I think this point is particularly significant as it helps go beyond the apparent ambiguity.¹⁰

I would tentatively suggest that the ambiguity has entered into the post-Conciliar reception phase as the term 'dialogue' was increasingly assumed to be incompatible with mission. Textual research of post-Conciliar writings would be required to substantiate this point in more detail and I have not undertaken that task.¹¹ However, my point is that there is a genuine difference between the development of Catholic personalisms and other forms of secular and religious personalisms at the time of the Council. The Catholic versions at the time of the Council still retained that the greatest good of the person, the *telos* of human flourishing, was the triune God. Catholic personalisms were not just a simple displacement of Scholasticisms, but different ways of personalising and broadening the basic scholastic concept of the *telos* through use of philosophical personalist categories. Catholic personalism developed quite specifically through thinkers like Charles Péguy, Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain who retained their Thomist structures and the vision of the final good of persons. Saint Pope John Paul II inherited and developed this tradition. Of course, the history of Catholic personalisms is hugely complex and varied, but Maritain was a key influence on the Council and on Paul VI.

⁹Nolan, *Privileged Moment*, 135-83.

¹⁰This is also the conclusion of a doctoral unpublished thesis by William Burrows, *The Roman Catholic Magisterium on Other Religious Ways: Analysis and Critique from a Postmodern Perspective*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987. Burrows later writings depart from these findings but with no adequate textual evidence.

¹¹Nolan, *Privileged Moment*, 243 begins to plot this in her poignant comments on Dupuis' translation of the Council documents that creates a shift in meaning and sensibility.

The key phrase in Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* indicating his attempt to reconcile the tension between traditional scholasticism and modern personalism is his use of *caritas*, 'charity', as the foundation for 'dialogue'. He says charity has a 'supreme position' in this approach:

We are convinced that charity should today assume its rightful, foremost position in the scale of religious and moral values - and not just in theory, but in the practice of the Christian life. And this applies not only to the charity we show toward God who has poured out the abundance of His love upon us, but also to the charity which *we in turn* should lavish on our brothers, the whole human race (56; my emphasis).

Paul VI is fusing together the modern personalist oriented approach with the truth oriented scholastic view, precisely as they were in Maritain's influential personalism.¹² Our love of God is understood as the source and goal of all love of persons, for it is from that love of God that true charity arises. Our loving a person for their own good requires loving the highest good for that person and freely wishing to share that love with them: the love of the triune God.

The personalist philosophy ensured that nothing which infringed on the freedom of the other could be compatible with love of the other. In contrast, Augustine had allowed for controlled torture in limited circumstances as a means to helping a person come to see the truth. Modern personalisms, both Catholic and otherwise, would not be quite so comfortable with this Augustinian hierarchy of values. However, some forms of modern personalism have failed to wrestle with the hierarchy of goods and have finally emplotted freedom as the sole *telos* with disastrous consequence.¹³ This is modernity's personalism. In contrast, Catholic personalism still retained the vision of the good and the true, which was God, as the final

¹²My emphasis. Paul VI was a close friend of Maritain. See Jacques Maritain, *Redeeming the Time*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943, 108-09.

¹³This I take to be the thrust of the critique of John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 32.

telos of persons in communion. Thus when Paul VI defines 'dialogue' in a later paragraph, it is this mixture of personalism and scholasticism that is being worked through when he writes in 64:

The very nature of the gifts which Christ has given the Church demands that they be extended to others and shared with others. This must be obvious from the words: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations," (Mt 28:19) Christ's final command to His apostles. The word apostle implies a mission from which there is no escaping.

To this internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, We will apply the word "dialogue."

This is the key point at which the two models become fused into a distinct Catholic personalist view of dialogue: embracing both the open-ended non-coercive enjoyment of the other, while retaining the belief that the other's good, as is my own, is found in worshipping the triune God.

It is precisely for this reason that *Lumen Gentium* 14-16 is structured as it is: God's love which is given to us in Christ must then radiate out towards the ends of the earth. The love of God in Christ who founds his Church is the centre of history (LG 14) with concentric rings, as with *Ecclesiam Suam*, flowing out from this unique historical intervention by the living God. The gift of Christ flows outward: first then are other Christian Churches and ecclesial bodies (LG 15), towards whom no mission is directed, but only the search for full unity under the visible sign of Peter. Then follows (LG 16) the great theistic religions: first, the Jews; and then the Muslims (see also *Nostra Aetate* 3, 2 respectively); and then finally, the non-theistic traditions both religious and non-religious (see also *Nostra Aetate* 2; and *Gaudium et Spes* that deals with non-religious traditions), to whom mission is directed out of love and with great respect for all that is good, true and beautiful in these

traditions.¹⁴ They all lack Christ, even if some are related to the true God as are Jews and Muslims. This notion of 'dialogue', not open-ended conversation alone, was the hallmark of Pope Paul and the Council.

If I am correct, what some Muslim and Catholic commentaries pick up as dissonance between the Council and the post-conciliar magisterium is incorrect.¹⁵ This is not an attempt to air-brush genuine dissonances and changes within magisterial teachings, which exist but not at the doctrinal level, but an attempt to be accurate to a logic that has often been misunderstood or evaded. Pope John Paul II faces this alleged dissonance head on when in *Redemptoris Missio* 55-56, written on the fifteenth anniversary of Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, he speaks of the intrinsic relationship between mission and dialogue:

Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions.

Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills. (*Redemptor Hominis*, 12) Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the "seeds of the Word," (*Ad Gentes*, 11, 15) a "ray of that truth which enlightens all men" (*Nostra Aetate*, 2) these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of humanity.

¹⁴Paul VI's concentric circles are revised so that the religions of Asia that are not predominantly theistic as they wrongly appear in Paul IV's depiction are acknowledged separately in NA 2.

¹⁵I think there is an important truth in Pope Benedict's point about there being two Councils: the actual Council; and the Council mediated through the press. See: "Reflection on Vatican II (Part 4)," 22 February 2013: <<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-s-reflection-on-vatican-ii-part-4>> (8 May 2014).

Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit. Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.

Dialogue and mission are intrinsically related and continuously developed in magisterial teachings. The reception of 'dialogue' after the Council has tended to separate the two, although some blame can be laid on 'time', for it takes time to clarify, distinguish and conceptually develop ideas. However, in my view the Catholic Church has not helped itself at all by separating the two dicasteries: one devoted to dialogue; another to mission. Cardinal Marella's founding speech at the establishment of the Secretariat for Non-Christians is telling. He said the Secretariat's sole role was to establish good relations and was not concerned with mission or doctrinal questions.¹⁶ While understandable at the time, it perhaps sent out subliminal signals that mission was incompatible with dialogue. Even while this has been corrected at the curial level, with the joint dicastery declaration *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the momentum of the separation continues through split dicastery oversight. Furthermore, one has to read papal speeches to bishops in countries with religion X to see the full picture, rather than just the speeches to those in religion X which of course presents only the positive bridges that exist.

There are further questions that must be addressed: can we be open to another's religious truth if we believe we have been given the truth in the self-revelation of God; and if we have been given this truth in Christ, do we really require anything else from dialogue? I cannot address these important questions. Pope John Paul II's answer to both is 'yes' (see above) along the following lines: if the Spirit and Christ are present in other religions, then Catholics can deepen their faith, be challenged,

¹⁶See ASCOV 2, 1, 41–6, 46.

develop the reform of the Church, and joyfully discover the great truths of a religion, Islam for example, that are to be celebrated; all this while testifying to the great love and truth that moves them to dialogue: God as trinitarian love; all this while witnessing and being witnessed to. This joined up process has been reiterated by the papal magisterium right up and including Pope Francis. In his *Evangelii Gaudium* he makes clear that dialogue and mission cannot be separated, even in the case of Judaism, where the witness/mission issue has been under most critical pressure. Pope Francis writes of dialogue and mission drawing on the fusion of Catholic personalism emphasising openness in truth and love:

An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties ... True openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being "open to understanding those of the other party" and "knowing that dialogue can enrich each side" [citing: *Redemptoris Missio*, 56]. What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says "yes" to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another (251).

All this is not to suggest dialogue is solely about mission, this is clearly not the case. It is to suggest that dialogue without mission and witness makes no sense as charity, love, derives from God and is ordered towards God. We cannot wish anything other than the highest good for the ones we love, which means we cannot wish other than Christian discipleship as the fulfilment of the human. But that also means we share, not impose; and are open to receive and reform and learn anew the great gift of love that is Christ.

2. Doctrinal Underpinning of Dialogue with Islam

Pope Paul's trip to Bethlehem during the second intersession of the Council was very significant in establishing three things that were taking place in the Council independent of his visit. First, whenever Judaism was mentioned, Islam also needed to be mentioned. The Holy Spirit moves in very complex ways. No statement or declaration had been planned regarding Islam, but rather only a short statement on the Jews rebutting the age old deicide charge and retrieving Romans 11 to indicate the importance of the Jewish covenant that was never abandoned by God. Given the reaction of some of the Arab world and many of the Eastern patriarchs to the news of this statement, Pope Paul was faced with either altogether dropping the statement on the Jews or adopting the tandem cycle policy: do not mention one without the other. The Council thankfully chose the difficult bicycle ride. Pope Paul achieved a great balancing act on this bike in his Bethlehem address and was deeply touched by the piety and affection shown to his office by Muslim crowds that greeted him.

Second, Pope Paul introduced the key doctrinal phrases in his speeches and *Ecclesiam Suam* that appear in Vatican II's texts: (a) that Catholics 'worship the same God' as Muslims worship; and (b) that Abraham provides a typological link between the two traditions.¹⁷ Let us look at these two key doctrinal bridges in turn and comment on subsequent magisterial developments, if any. By restricting myself to

¹⁷Bethlehem speech: "those who profess monotheism and with us render religious worship to the one true God, the living and supreme God, the God of Abraham, the most high. . . May these peoples, adorers of the one God, also welcome our best wishes for peace in justice." Francesco DeGoia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006, 159.

Ecclesiam Suam: "Then we have those worshippers who adhere to another monotheistic conception (or form) of religion, especially the Muhammadans. Their true and evident worship of God merits our admiration" (107).

magisterial statements I should say that they develop usually some years behind the best theological thinking on the matter. But that is too big a canvass to encompass, but it should remind us that necessarily the magisterium is not a research organisation but a consolidator of the best researches and experiences of local churches.

Regarding the first and most important bridge, the same God, Islam is sort of placed in a time capsule and progressed from the status of 'heresy' and more precisely an 'infidel' religion to that of a religion where the true God is worshipped. How did the time capsule get fuelled? The answer is simple, and one deftly explored by Stephen Bullivant: the grade A highly purified octane doctrine of invincible ignorance did the rocket science, playing a major and subtle role in papal teachings since 1854.¹⁸ In the past, Muslims were understood to have rejected the divinity of Christ and the truth of the trinity and thus correlatively understood to have corrupted the truth – they were infidels. At the Council, those rejections of the truth of Catholicism were understood as possibly taking place in 'good conscience', i.e., the average Muslim was invincibly ignorant of the true Gospel, and thus the positive elements of their religion could come to the foreground, rather than their denials (sic) of the true religion. We can see how the mechanism works by observing a statement made in Pope Pius X's *Catechism* (1908) that was used in Rome and Italy, but not further afield. Pius X defines 'infidels':

12. Question: Who are infidels?

Answer: Infidels are those who have not been baptized and do not believe in Jesus Christ, because they either believe in and worship false gods as idolaters do, or though admitting one true God, they do not believe in the Messiah, neither as

¹⁸Stephen Bullivant, "Sine Culpa. Vatican II and Inculpable Ignorance," *Theological Studies*, 72, 2011, 70-86.

already come in the Person of Jesus Christ, nor as to come; for instance, Mohammedans and the like.¹⁹

Muslims certainly do not worship false gods nor are they idolaters, even while they are infidels. They are not infidels like those who are polytheists, or those who worship shopping or absolute fans of Madonna who are all involved in differing forms of idolatry. I cannot find a single pope who denies that Islam has a genuine monotheism, although admittedly, it is difficult to find any pope doing so in a solemn manner.²⁰ This is the breakthrough of *Lumen Gentium* 16 and since this is a dogmatic constitution and it speaks about the true God, there can be no turning back on that matter. The sole pope cited by the Council, Pope Gregory VII in 1076 NA 3, note X²¹ does technically and correctly indicate that this teaching is not novel, although Pope Gregory's motivation and his overall attitude to Islam are at best ambiguous. One might even be tempted to say that the key shift in the 1960's was not in the startling common theological bonds affirmed, but in the way invincible ignorance allowed these bonds to be foregrounded. This holds true of the religions in general, and certainly Islam in particular.

Once the invincible ignorance jet fuel is added, and the differences between the religions not denied, there is endless

¹⁹<<http://www.basilica.org/pages/ebooks/Msgr.%20Hagan-The%20Catechism%20of%20Saint%20Pope%20Pius%20X.pdf>> (11 March 2014).

²⁰See the ground breaking research on papal statements on Islam by Andrew Unsworth, *A Historical and Textual-Critical Analysis of the Magisterial Documents of the Catholic Church on Islam: Towards a Hetero-descriptive Account of Muslim Belief and Practice*, Doctoral Dissertation, London: Heythrop College, 2007.

²¹Gregory VII, Letter III, 21 to Anazir [Al-Nasir], King of Mauretania PL, 148.451A; and also cited by Pope John Paul II on a number of occasions in speeches to Muslims. For example, address to the delegation of the World Islamic Call Society, Rome, 15 January 1990 (along with others available at "Vatican Council And Papal Statements On Islam" (May 2014): <<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/interreligious/islam/vatican-council-and-papal-statements-on-islam.cfm>> (1 May 2014).

room to explore the riches of God's work in Islam. The Council recognises the formal situation that the Qur'an does not accept Jesus as incarnate (NA 3), but rightly chooses to focus on what is shared in common with Muslims: a common creator God; a merciful and all powerful law giver, who is the final just judge; and that the worship of this God can be seen in constant and genuine prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Upon the single plank, which is as large a plank as one could desire, the true God, the slow building of commonality begins without denying differences. This is the truly lasting significant gift of the Council regarding Islam. This building would continue in NA 3 and after the Council. It opened the most important door for a real reverence towards Islam and its piety and religious practices. Without the one true God which is worshipped by both, none of this would be possible.

But the question of the source of this worship of the one true God in Islam still remains. It was unsurprisingly unresolved at the Council. Technically there were three types of answers available at the time to the question of how do Muslims come to know and worship the one true God. And in this question we discover the importance of the reference to Abraham in the Council documents. By naming Abraham, even without doing so other than describing how Muslims understand their faith, the Council opens a line of enquiry that has been immensely fruitful in building bridges, although the precise shape of the bridge regarding Abraham is still elusive. What are the three models?

First, all men and women are related to the one true God through virtue of their being created in God's image and their seeing the marks of the creator in creation. The solution here could be called 'natural theology' or 'natural revelation' – and in earlier Catholic theology was called 'primitive revelation' or 'primal revelation'.²² Indeed, Mikka Ruokannen (and an earlier

²²See Jean Daniélou, *God and the Ways of Knowing*, Cleavland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1957 for the best summary of theology regarding this question at the time of the Council; and Riccardo Lombardi, *The*

incarnation of Gavin D'Costa) argued this was the likely understanding behind the Council's teachings.²³ While this is seen as a conservative and unnecessarily restrictive reading by some Catholic theologians (including the later incarnation of D'Costa), there is an irony present in this reading which currently has few supporters because in some respects it fits the Muslim view of the matter best. For Muslims a basic revelation was given to all humankind at the beginning and the Qur'an teaches nothing new from what was given to all humankind.²⁴ Hence the irony is that what seems like a step forward in Catholic theological appraisals of the status of Islam turns out to be a step too far within the revelatory world of many Muslims. This simply indicates the complexity of dialogue whereby viewing the other through their own categories provides all sorts of delightful problems in making sense of how our own categories might or might not map on.

The second solution, in Catholic theological categories is an advance: Muslims came to know the one true God because they knew, *in some form or other*, the scriptural traditions of the Jews and Christians. There is a move beyond the natural knowledge of God and an entry into the history of special revelation. It is because of this dependence upon true scripture that Muslims have come to worship the same God as Christian, despite other errors. The interesting thing about this solution is that it means that Islam cannot be regarded simply as natural revelation but has some place, even if derivatively, in the special history of supernatural revelation. If we are attentive to the Council, *Dei Verbum* did not use the distinctions natural and supernatural revelation, as these distinctions were being debated by

Salvation of the Unbeliever, trans., Dorothy M. White, London: Burns & Oates, 1956.

²³Mikka Ruokanen, *Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions: According to the Second Vatican Council*, Leiden: Brill, 1992, 77; and D'Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity*, New York: Orbis Books, 2000, 102-03.

²⁴This is the difference between progressive revelation in Christianity and a static (non-pejoratively) revelation in Islam.

theologians with considerable difficulties unresolved. Instead, *Dei Verbum* showed the stages of salvation history within which, typographically, Islam could speculatively fit. In article 3 we find:

God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see Rom. 2:6-7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

Dei Verbum was not concerned with Islam and could not be given the newness of this discussion, but at its best, within this theory (and given the general teachings on religion in the Council) it is seen as a preparation for the Gospel, *praeparatio evangelica*.²⁵ Clearly, this provides grounds for special reverence

²⁵The general rules from the Council documents on how to view other religions can be summarised thus: First, the necessity of the Church for salvation is a *de fide* teaching and contextualized at the Council by the recognition that there are many outside the Church who have not heard the gospel through no fault of their own. This contextualization, called "invincible ignorance," helped Catholic theology move into a new and interesting space. It can view non-Christians in terms of the positive teachings and practices they advance, rather than in terms of the rejection of the true faith. Second, the Council teaches that mission should be undertaken towards all peoples, religious or secular, except other Christians. The Council

from Catholics towards Islam, even if it provides strong grounds for objections from Muslims. The complex ironies increase.

Above, I defined the second solution as follows: Muslims came to know the one true God because they knew, *in some form or other*, the scriptural traditions of the Jews and Christians. The 'some form or other' phrase denotes the problem because there are two possible routes for this transmission of biblical tradition in Islam. It could be through the teachings of Muhammad (or from a Muslim point of view, through the recitation by the prophet Muhammad of what God dictated through the angel to Muhammad); and it could be through the text of the Qur'an (from a Muslim point of view, the Qur'an is God's utterance that also happens to expose the ways Jews and Christians have corrupted their sacred texts given to them by God).²⁶ Giving either Muhammad or the Qur'an any type of revelatory status was replete with problems for it would imply that Christianity

established a doctrinal heart to missiology which is based on the intra-trinitarian missions within God. There are no exceptions to the universal mandate of mission. Third, Aquinas's key concept of *ordinantur* was used to designate all non-Christians. This usage sees in the positive elements within the religions an orientation (*ordinantur*) towards the Gospel. All the non-Christian religions, in varying ways, belong to the "People of God" in potentiality. This potentiality is actualized on earth through supernatural faith in Christ and by baptism. Fourth, [the Council uses] the traditional category of *praeparatio evangelica*. Fifth, sin and Satan have a strong grip over people who have not accepted Christ manifested in the objective reality of the non-Christian religions and cultures. Objectively, as a whole, they are in error, despite the many truths to be found in them. The only response to sin is to preach Christ, who redeems the sins of the world. This teaching does not take back what has been said about the positive elements that act as a preparation for Christ, but contextualizes these elements within the dramatic framework of the history of salvation.

²⁶The manner of corruption and the historical possibilities of envisaging all these scenarios is hugely complex and beyond my remit (and competence).

was revealed to have been corrupted and that Islam was the true religion. In my book on the Council's teachings, I have argued that from the evidence of the speeches at the Council, the dependency theory informed the understanding of the Fathers, but was not formally taught at the Council.²⁷ The mention of Abraham in the Council texts fits into this paradigm, even if this paradigm was not formally taught or denied, although it was contingently assumed at the debate.

While many Muslims and some Catholics see this as an insulting solution, I believe that its strength must be gauged by its historical plausibility as well as its theological implications, not *per se* by its reception by Muslims. If dialogue is serious, Muslim reactions to any solutions are of paramount importance, but these reactions cannot become authoritative sources in searching for solutions to intra-Christian questions. Given that the state of research on this question is entirely unresolved, it would be difficult to say this was the best answer, but rather that it could be a possible answer.

Third solution: Muslims come to know the true God through the Qur'an whose teachings regarding monotheism are true, although its teachings about the incarnation and trinity are false.²⁸ Please note, this solution could revert to a variation of the first solution so that the Qur'an's monotheism is

²⁷Gavin D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 178-210.

²⁸See the variety of appraisals of the Qur'an by Catholic scholars in David Marshall, "Roman Catholic Approaches to the Qur'an since Vatican II," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 25:1, 2014, 89-100; and his survey of Catholic appraisals of Muhammad: "Muhammad in Contemporary Christian Theological Reflection, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*," 24:2, 2013, 161-172. For a wider post-conciliar overview of Catholic scholarship on this and other issues, see Christian W. Troll, "Changing Catholic views of Islam" in Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid 20th Century*, Leuven: Peeters Press, 1998, 19-77. These articles begin to help shape the many possible trajectories within this third option.

assimilated into natural theology. However, it need not go down that route, but it could move up the channel so that the Qur'an is seen as containing some divine transmission of truth but without these being derivative. Since the Council avoided any decision about the Qur'an and does not mention it, much to the consternation of some Muslim and some Catholic commentators, it is difficult to see this as the solution of the Council. However, and here we find the manner in which the development of doctrine might take place in the future, this solution is not *per se* ruled out by the Council as I argued above. While I would argue that the Council's response is best located within the second option, it is also clear that the Council texts do not make a judgment on the explanatory hypothesis underlying the teaching. Interestingly, Pope John Paul II has begun to move into the second channel of this paradigm in his official teachings, although his private writings create an important qualification or warning. Let me explain.

Pope John Paul II is the first pope who begins to approvingly and reverently cite the Qur'an in speeches to Muslims.²⁹ He always does so by citing a parallel text in Christian scripture, but there is no explicit or implicit theory of derivation, but rather this indicates perhaps the criteria by which Christians must discern what is true or false in the Qur'an – and also be open to be questioned by the Qur'an. I have chosen a particular quote to illustrate my point because the Pope also resolves one way of dealing with the Abrahamic issue, which is consistent in his speeches. He resolves it by leaving it unresolved. He acknowledges that Muslims see their faith as deriving from Abraham. In this respect he stays with the Council's ambiguity, even if some theologians have marched down bold and interesting Abrahamic avenues which indicate the many avenues that require further research on this

²⁹See the collection on the Catholic Bishops of the USA website, cited above; and more texts in Francesco Goia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963–1995)*, Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997.

matter.³⁰ Here is an example from his address to the Catholic community of Ankara, Turkey, November 29, 1979:

Faith in God, professed by the spiritual descendants of Abraham—Christians, Muslims and Jews—when it is lived sincerely, when it penetrates life, is a certain foundation of the dignity, brotherhood and freedom of men and a principle of uprightness for moral conduct and life in society. And there is more: as a result of this faith in God the Creator and transcendent, one man finds himself at the summit of creation. He was created, the Bible teaches, "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:27); for the Qur'an, the sacred book of the Muslims, although man is made of dust, "God breathed into him his spirit and endowed him with hearing, sight and heart," that is, intelligence (Surah 32.8).³¹

Some writers see in his citations of the Qur'an an important step forward, but it is difficult to judge the full implications. Positively, it shows the magisterium moving a step forward from the Council in acknowledging that the Qur'an contains both natural and divine truths. The divine truth relates to

³⁰Thomas Michel, S. J., "Where to Now? Ways forward for Interreligious Dialogue: Images of Abraham as Models of Inter-religious Encounter," *The Muslim World*, 100, 4, 2010, 530–538. The commonality and complexity of this 'Abrahamic link' is thoroughly outlined in the second edition of the classic work by F. E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, A New Edition, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

³¹John Paul II, address to the Catholic community of Ankara, Turkey, November 29, 1979. See also for example: John Paul II, address on his Visit to the Umayyad Great Mosque, May 6, 2001: "As we make our way through life toward our heavenly destiny, Christians feel the company of Mary, the mother of Jesus; and Islam too pays tribute to Mary and hails her as 'chosen above the women of the world' (Qur'an, 3:42). The virgin of Nazareth, the Lady of Saydnāya, has taught us that God protects the humble and "scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Luke 1:51)." <[https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/may/documents/hf_jpii_spe_20010506_omayya di.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/may/documents/hf_jpii_spe_20010506_omayya_di.html) (1 May 2014).

Mary's role and her virginity, cited in another speech.³² These quotations also show a positive regard and reverence for the holy book of Muslims. These are important steps and Pope Francis seems to be continuing them in keeping a reference to the 'sacred writings' (*Los escritos sagrados*) of Islam, although why it is in the plural is not clear. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis writes: "The sacred writings of Islam have retained some Christian teachings; Jesus and Mary receive profound veneration and it is admirable to see how Muslims both young and old, men and women, make time for daily prayer and faithfully take part in religious services."³³ The point is not dissimilar to that of John Paul II, for it now grounds the relation with the true God in the Qur'an. This is a step beyond the Council, a development of insight, not necessarily doctrine. (I am not sure whether this teaching could be considered doctrinal for the deposit of faith must be applied to the Qur'an and does not address it, except through the history of Israel and Christian scripture.)

But before concluding one must mention Pope John Paul II's comments on revelation in the Qur'an to get a fuller picture, although the text I am drawing on has no clear magisterial status and comes from a single authored book which has become a popular genre within last three popes. In *Crossing the Threshold of Faith* he writes:

Whoever knows the Old and New Testaments, and then reads the Koran, clearly sees the *process by which it completely reduces Divine Revelation*. It is impossible not to note the movement away from what God has said about Himself,

³²See previous note.

³³At the time of writing, there is still no official Latin text, so the Spanish text is probably the most accurate and reads: "*Los escritos sagrados del Islam conservan parte de las enseñanzas cristianas; Jesucristo y María son objeto de profunda veneración, y es admirable ver cómo jóvenes y ancianos, mujeres y varones del Islam son capaces de dedicar tiempo diariamente a la oración y de participar fielmente de sus ritos religiosos.*" Pope Francis has not moved beyond John Paul II's position on Abraham.

first in the Old Testament through the Prophets, and then finally in the New Testament through His Son. In Islam all the richness of God's self revelation, which constitutes the heritage of the Old and New Testaments, has definitely been set aside.³⁴

He is drawing attention to the difference between what I called progressive and static revelation above. Hence, in reading the positive statements on the Qur'an, we must not assume that radical differences of even what constitutes 'revelation' can be bypassed. Clearly Pope John Paul II could not speak these words in a public address simply because of diplomacy. Pope Benedict got caught out on this manner, but the subtle substance of his claim at Regensburg has sadly disappeared from view. Such is the diplomacy of public dialogue, despite the desire that it should be at the service of truth.

Catholic theologians who are also experts in Islam are actually unresolved about which model, if any of these, to accept, although there are proponents of all three. The magisterium if it moves into the orbit of the third model only does so to affirm divine truths already known in Christianity, without mitigating the spiritual riches in Islam or learning from Islam in dialogue. But the step forward from the Council has been taken: the Qur'an has come into the picture. But Muslims might rightly say: whose Qur'an, which interpretation? Is it the one that Christians interpret as they wish to or the one that we live by and interpret. As you can see the dialogue has hardly begun.

3. Conclusion

I have sought to show that 'dialogue' involves openness and love and attention to the truth, and is entirely compatible, indeed requires mission, for it to be loving dialogue, as Pope Paul said, born from 'caritas'. I have sought to show that the two momentous doctrinal moves made in the Council are not entirely novel, but have become so given the doctrine of

³⁴John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, 92.

invincible ignorance. I have also sought to show that despite these remarkable steps, the asymmetries between Islam and Catholics, despite their worshipping the same God, for which we should praise God, still means that what are steps forward for Catholics towards Islam can rightly be seen as sideway or backwards steps to Muslims. The metaphor of dance comes to mind but rather than a waltz or tango in tandem, the notion of a slightly chaotic community dance seems to better express the complex reality of dialogue between Muslims and Catholics on the doctrinal level.