CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE: INTERRELIGIOUS PROSPECTS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21st century, of the world's five great, enduring religions, the two youngest are also the two most dogmatic—the two least likely to be able to conduct a dialogue with genuine and mutual respect. Today, Christianity and Islam are the clearest examples of creedalism—and thereby, the two religious groups least likely to seek or be able to sustain effective discourse that goes beyond mere tolerance.

But the press of historical and current geopolitical events provokes especially Christians and Muslims to develop more effective dialogue. Each of these evangelical religions claims to have the "master narrative" for the way things are. The ironic and grave conclusion: it seems that the two religious groups that most need to talk successfully with each other today are the two least likely to be able to do so!

Today, some Muslims speak of *jihad* as the only response for the outrages committed by the "Crusader" Christians in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Israel, and elsewhere. At the same time, some Christians speak of the Prophet or Islam as the anti-Christ. It is clear to all that grave consequences could follow from decline or diminishment in effective dialogues between the peoples of Islam and Christianity.

The critical importance of achieving and sustaining successful dialogues between Christians and Muslims compels our attention and prompts this investigation. To put matters in context, we first review the highlights of Christian-Muslim history, followed by a survey of current Christian-Muslim dialogues—particularly theological discourses and texts. Next, we identify and describe the apparent, major impediments to improving these dialogues. Finally, we seek to identify key conditions for the possibility of improving future dialogues; and to

determine, as best we can, whether the prospects for interreligious dialogue at the beginning of this century are optimistic or not.

Our inquiry requires two simple assumptions. First, we assume that no attempt to assess the status, problems, or success factors for dialogue between two groups can be cogent without including important voices from both sides of the dialogue. Accordingly, our investigation seeks to survey various prominent or authoritative voices on each side of the current, formal dialogues—listening to both Muslims and Christians in "their own words." (Note that the Arabic terms used throughout this text are italicized in Roman script—their standardized English spellings and basic definitions are listed in the glossary at the end.)

Embarking on this survey, we acknowledge that there are many voices to be heard—especially from the Christian side with its multiplicity of denominations and theologies. But, we assume that by constricting our universe of discourse to exclude transient or redundant voices, it is still possible to accurately characterize the general and recurring dialogical features. So, our investigation here focuses on the formal dialogues that have occurred or are continuing in major venues—primarily involving the dominant Christian churches in the West, including the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant denominations.

Although our focus is on interreligious-theological discourse between Muslims and Christians, this investigation demonstrates that such discourse needs to be understood as a process synchronous with cultural, social, economic, political, philosophical, and other types of discourses between Christian and Muslim people.

1. THE STATUS OF CURRENT CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

Historical Background

The history of encounters between Christians and Muslims is long and often punctuated by episodes of ignorance, fear, and violence. Although a rich understanding of their encounters and relationships over the past 1400 years is essential for understanding the current status of their philosophical, theological, and other current dialogues, an extended history is well beyond the scope of this investigation. So, the historical summary that follows is only a very brief review of some of the major forces and themes in Christian-Muslim history. For more complete and detailed historical summaries of their interactions, *Christians Meeting Muslims: WCC Papers on Ten Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (World Council of Churches 1977), offers extended discussion of past and present Christian-Muslim interactions. *The Muslim-Christian Dialogue of the Last Ten Years* (Borrmans 1981a), gives accurate sketches of the histories of Islam and of Christian-Muslim relations through the centuries. Also, *Christian-Muslim Relations: An Introduction for Christians in the United States of America* (Speight 1983), offers extensive information on the historical, religious/devotional, and ethnogeographical background of Muslims and discusses Islamic resurgence in the modem world.

First Encounters

On the Christian calendar, Muhammad received the divine revelations that are recorded in the *Qur'an* about 610. By 612, he was preaching to the people of Mecca. In 622 (1 A.H.), Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina (*Hijrah*)—a migration that marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. By the time of Muhammad's death about 632, "…it is claimed that most of the

Arabs of the western parts of the Arabian Peninsula had submitted to his prophetic leadership and joined the *ummah*, or community of believers, animated by the ideal of *islam*, or submission to the will of Allah." (Fletcher 2003, 11) Although Muhammad considered himself as merely the Messenger of God, called to complete the divine revelation that began with the earlier prophets like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, he became the *de facto* founder of a new religion that spread with astonishing speed through early military conquests. Within twenty years of his death, his followers had conquered large parts of the disintegrating Roman Empire and completely absorbed the remnants of the anemic Persian Empire. By about the time of the capture of Jerusalem by the Muslims in 638—an early *jihad*, the Christian discourse about Islam begins its long history of misunderstanding and hostility.

Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem who negotiated the surrender of the city to the Muslims considered the invasion as divine punishment for the sins of Christians. At about the same time, in an anti-Jewish polemic in dialogue format known as *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati* [The Teaching of Jacob the Newly-Baptized], one of the interlocutors, a Palestinian Jew named Abraham says:

> A false prophet has appeared among the Saracens… I, Abraham, referred the matter to an old man very well-versed in the scriptures. I asked him: 'What is your view, master and teacher, of the prophet who has appeared among the Saracens?' He replied, groaning mightily: 'He is an impostor. Do the prophets come with sword and chariot? Truly these happenings today are works of disorder… But you go off, Master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared.' So I, Abraham, made enquiries, and was told by those who had met him: 'There is no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only bloodshed; for he says he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible. (Fletcher 2003, 16-17)

During this same period, Isidore, Archbishop of Seville and one of the greatest Christian scholars of the early Middle Ages, explains Arabs as descendants of Ishmael who is first mentioned in Genesis as the eldest son of Abraham by Hagar—Sarah's female Egyptian slave. In

the *Qur'an*, Ishmael is considered one of the prophets of Islam. But in Christian theology, it is Isaac, not Ishmael who is the heir of Abraham. Only Isaac inherits the promises that God had made to Abraham and his offspring (Genesis 21:12-13). With this kind of genealogy, Muhammad was quickly and broadly understood as yet another Christian heretic, and Islam became yet another heresy *de jour* in a period beset with many challenges to Christian doctrinal orthodoxy.

Early Muslim conquests: Byzantine-Arab Wars (632-718), conquest of Persia (636-651), conquest of Transoxiana (662-709), conquest of Sindh (664-712), and the conquest of Iberia (711-718), were obvious evidence that Islam was not a religion of peace and love. Hostile views of Muhammad and Islam spread far and wide and quickly throughout Christendom. Less than a hundred years after the death of Muhammad, in a 716 biblical commentary, Bede, a monk at the Northumbrian monastery of Saint Peter at Wearmouth in modern Jarrow, Great Britain, described the Saracens as "enemies of the Church." At about the same time, Boniface, a great English missionary in Germany advises a friend to postpone her planned trip to Rome due to "the raids and turbulence and menace of the Saracens which have been going on lately." (Fletcher 2003, 18-19)

Also at about the same time, the Christian theologian Yanah ibn Sarjun ibn Mansur, now known as John of Damascus, wrote a *Dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian* and *Concerning Heresy*. After working as a fiscal public servant in the employ of the Muslim caliph of Damascus, John became a monk in the still-extant monastery of St. Saba near the Dead Sea in Israel. In his *Dialogue*, described as "a kind of textbook of disputation," John has a Muslim pose difficult questions to a Christian relating to various doctrinal matters. With the Christian's skillful argumentation, the *Dialogue* concludes "the Saracen went his way surprised and

bewildered, having nothing more to say." (Fletcher 2003, 24) In *Concerning Heresy*, based on the *Panarion* by Epiphanius, John adds twenty new heresies to the original list of eighty heresies in the *Panarion*. In the section on the superstition of the Ishmaelites, John accuses Muhammad of being a false prophet who adapted some of his teachings from the Old and New Testaments and from the teachings of Bahira, a heretical Christian monk. John continues with ridicule of Islamic doctrines and practices and he relates various scurrilous stories about Muhammad. (Fletcher 2003, 25)

> Since he had been educated at the Umayyad court in Damascus around 680 A.D., John knew quite well what he was talking about. However, he could only measure this new religious phenomenon by the central norm of his Christian tradition, and it is precisely because the *Qur'an* contained traditions about Jesus Christ that John could deem them inadequate and therefore heretical. At that time, the new religion handed down by Muhammad was not yet known as Islam, and therefore John of Damascus uses three names that connect this religion with the stories about Abraham or Ibrahīm: Ishmaelites (children of Ishmael, the first son of Abraham), Hagarenes (children of Hagar, Ishmael's mother, but the Arabic may also mean 'those who have performed the *hijra')*, and finally Saracenes. This final name became the standard name for Muslims in the Middle Ages. (Valkenberg 2005, 5**)**

Isidore, Bede, Boniface, and John Damascene—all eventually proclaimed saints by the Catholic Church—were dominant voices that articulated the early Christian perceptions about Islam as a detestable heresy. Their antagonistic voices set up the conditions for later confrontations and set the tone for centuries of future dialogue. Indeed, just as the St. Saba monastery spans the centuries, John Damascene's *Dialoge* and *Concerning Heresy* —both composed at this monastery—typify the dominant tone for most of the Christian-Muslim dialogue up to our own time. For many centuries, Christianity's theological framework did not discuss the existence of other religious faiths. And for most of the intervening centuries between Islam's emergence and today, Christianity has framed Islam as a heresy and Muhammad as a "son of darkness."

> If Christians think that Christ is God's final and unsurpassable revelation—in the same manner as Muslims think that the *Qur'ān* is God's final and unsurpassable revelation—they have great difficulty to recognize Muhammad as God's prophet and messenger because that would jeopardize their confession of Christ as God's final Word. This genetic relationship makes it understandable—though inexcusable—that Christians have given such a distorted picture of Islam and Prophet Muhammad in history." (Valkenberg 2005, 6**)**

Muslim *Jihad al Akbar* and Christian Crusades

A series of four caliphs (from *khalifa* or "successor"), known as the Rightly Guided or Righteous Caliphs, succeeded Muhammad after his death in 632. Under their direction, Arab armies brought the new faith from Arabia in a series of shock waves that cut the Mediterranean world in half, reduced the Eastern Roman Empire to a shadow of its former glory, and created the conditions in which Christian culture would migrate in a north-westerly direction—grouping around the shores of the northern seas. (Fletcher 2003, 61)

After the assassination of Ali ibn Abi Talib—Muhammad's cousin, son-in-law, and fourth caliph in 661, Muawiya, the governor of Syria seized power and established the Umayyad caliphate—the first Islamic dynasty (661–750). At this time, the locus of Islamic power shifted from the Arabian Peninsula to Syria. With Muawiya's accession, the seat of the caliphate was moved to Damascus—the new capital of an empire that extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus River.

The Umayyads were succeeded by the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258), and the focal point of Islamic political and cultural life shifted from Syria to Iraq. In 762, Baghdad, the circular City of Peace (*madinat al-salam*), became the new capital. The first three centuries of Abbasid rule were a golden age in which Baghdad and Samarra (a city established by the Abbasids north of Baghdad), became the political, cultural, and commercial capitals of the Islamic world.

The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates were under *Sunni* control. But *Shi'a* do not recognize Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman as the first three caliphs (Ali was recognized as the fourth caliph 656 AD). *Shi'a* Muslims believe that the split between the *Shi'a* and *Sunni* began with Muhammad's death, when some number of Muslims supported the successorship of Ali and the rest forcibly accepted the other caliphs.

> The *Shi'ite* movement, growing obscurely in North Africa, had been able to lay hold of Egypt in the tenth century and found a rival caliphate at Cairo in 969. This new claimant to spiritual authority within the Islamic world was known as the Fatimid caliphate because the ruling dynasty claimed descent from the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Meanwhile, in Baghdad, partly as cause, partly as consequence of the rise of the Fatimids, the Abbasid caliphate had been weakened by palace faction and military coups, the usual diseases of court-based political systems…In these circumstances the fringes of the Abbasid polity, for example in Syria and Palestine, were left to their own devices and tended to fragment…vulnerable and of course coveted by their more powerful neighbors. (Fletcher 2003, 75)

One of those neighbors was the Fatimid caliphate. But in the same year that the Fatimids became established in Egypt, Byzantine armies recaptured Antioch. Into this unstable world, the Seljuk Turks, who were *Sunni* Muslims and therefore loyal subjects of the Abbasid caliphate, were driven to "…reaffirm orthodox *Sunni* Islam in the face of its rivals. The principal rival was necessarily the heretical Fatimid caliphate in Egypt, and a long way after that came the Christian Byzantines…"(Fletcher 2003, 76)

Driving toward the Fatimids in Egypt, the Seljuk Turks took over control of Jerusalem in 1071 from the comparatively tolerant Egyptians under the Fatimid caliph. In the same year, the Seljuks defeated and captured the Byzantine emperor Romanus IV at the Battle of Manzikert. Threatened by these developments, in 1095 the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Komnenos appealed to Pope Urban II for help. Partially in response to this appeal and partially to achieve other purposes, the West responded with what came to be known as the First Crusade. "Modern historians have speculated that two internal problems also helped trigger the First Crusade: an

attempt, begun by Pope Gregory VII, to reform the church, and the pressing need to strengthen the weakened Papacy itself." (Columbia Encyclopedia 2001-05)

In his call for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, Pope Urban II exaggerates the anti-Christian acts of the Muslims, legitimizes the resort to military means as the only way to protect the Holy Sepulcher, promises that the mission will count for full remission of sins, and proclaims that the battle cry of the Christians should be *Deus volt* [God wills it]. One account of his call to crusade even indicates that Urban II motivated his audience with fear of conquest—arguing that Muslim attacks would continue and spread beyond Asia Minor if not stopped by military action:

> …as the most of you have heard, the Turks and Arabs have attacked them and have conquered the territory of Romania [the Greek empire] as far west as the shore of the Mediterranean and the Hellespont, which is called the Arm of St. George. They have occupied more and more of the lands of those Christians, and have overcome them in seven battles. They have killed and captured many, and have destroyed the churches and devastated the empire. If you permit them to continue thus for awhile with impurity, the faithful of God will be much more widely attacked by them. On this account I, or rather the Lord, beseech you as Christ's heralds to publish this everywhere and to persuade all people of whatever rank, foot-soldiers and knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to those Christians and to destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends. …Moreover, Christ commands it….All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested. O what a disgrace if such a despised and base race, which worships demons, should conquer a people which has the faith of omnipotent God and is made glorious with the name of Christ! (Fulcher of Chartres ~1095)

Urban II's call to holy violence resulted in a temporary military success. But it was a complete failure as a demonstration of Christian rectitude. Even today, almost a thousand years later, Muslim memories of this event are not dulled:

> In 1099, when the Crusaders took Jerusalem, they massacred 40,000 Muslims–men, women, and children. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the holiest church in Christendom, the site of Calvary, was a pool of blood. The Crusaders found Jews huddled in the main synagogue in Jerusalem and burned them to death, dancing around the pyre and singing *Te Deum*. After the killing, the looting started. The mosque of Umar was sacked; the tomb of Abraham was destroyed. "In the Temple and the porch of Solomon,

> men rode in blood up to their knees and bridal reins," wrote Raymond of Aguilers, an eyewitness chronicler of the First Crusade. Women were not spared, he observed: "The Franks did no other harm to the women whom they found in the enemy camp, save that they ran their lances through their bellies." The Jews were perhaps the worst hit: "To the Jews of Palestine the white knights of Europe came as the ravens of the apocalypse." (Ahmed 2005)

The rhetoric of Urban II was repeated again and again. In his command for the Second Crusade, Pope Eugene II, supported by his mentor, Bernard of Clairvaux, again promises spiritual benefits from a military response to the infidels:

> We exhort therefore all of you in God, we ask and command, and, for the remission of sins enjoin: that those who are of God, and, above all, the greater men and the nobles do manfully gird themselves; and that you strive so to oppose the multitude of the infidels, who rejoice at the time in a victory gained over us, and so to defend the oriental church. (Eugene III 1146)

By the time of the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), Pope Innocent III began to recognize that the strategy of holy war was failing to achieve its intended goals. In an angry letter to the papal legate after the sacking of Constantinople by the crusaders from the West, he wrote:

> How, indeed, is the Greek church to be brought back into ecclesiastical union and to a devotion for the Apostolic See when she has been beset with so many afflictions and persecutions that she sees in the Latins only an example of perdition and the works of darkness, so that she now, and with reason, detests the Latins more than dogs? As for those who were supposed to be seeking the ends of Jesus Christ, not their own ends, whose swords, which they were supposed to use against the pagans, are now dripping with Christian blood… (Innocent III 1204)

During the crusading epoch—ending with the Ninth Crusade (1271–72), the Christian-Muslim dialogue of war was also a backdrop for the emergence of new political, commercial, and intellectual discourses.

During the early Abbasid period, the scientific and philosophical learning of the ancient world was translated and diffused throughout the *Dar-ul-Islam*. Over time, this learning became diffused in the West—especially via the newly emergent universities.

The Emergence of Intellectual Dialogue

Even as the waning crusading impulse continued to shape Western Christian discourses about the "others" in the East, the newly available translations of Greek antiquity—especially the works of Aristotle—presented a new challenge. Here was a system of thought that presented the world as intelligible without the need for divine revelation. How could the dictates of reason be reconciled with the dictates of God? Rabbi Moses Maimonides proposed the Jewish answer in his *Guide for the Perplexed*. From the Muslim viewpoint, Averroës (1126-98) provided an answer in his commentaries on Aristotle and in works like *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*. Working with Latin translations from Maimonides and Averroës, Thomas Aquinas formulated the normative Christian response in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*. Particularly in his work at the University of Paris where he became actively involved in the controversy between the university and the Friar-Preachers about the liberty of teaching, Aquinas marks out a new course for interreligious dialogue. For the first time, here was a Christian who listened to "heretics" and even agreed with them. "The work of Thomas Aquinas may be distinguished from that of many of his contemporaries by his attention to the writings of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), a Jew, and Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna] (980-1037), a Muslim…" (Burrell 1994a, 13)

The Crusades failed to extend the Holy Roman Empire to the Muslim-controlled lands in the East and North Africa and to suppress the "heresy" of Islam. In a geopolitical and theological stalemate, Christians and Muslims entered into pragmatic accommodations with each other. Over the next several hundred years, as the Western world solidified into two distinct religious/political/cultural blocs, Christians and Muslims engaged in mostly practical dialogues based on common needs for information, social order, and commerce.

> …there have always been relations between Christians and Muslims. The *Qur'an* itself contains references to Christians and indications on the way dialogue should be conducted. At different periods and in different places the relationship has been one of co-operation or conflict. There has been much cultural interaction between Christians and Muslims. One could mention the Christian contributions to the Islamic assimilation of the Greek heritage in 'Abbassid times and then the transmission of this heritage to Europe. One could mention the cultural developments in Ummayad Spain and in Sicily under the Normans. One could recall the collaboration of Christians and Muslims during the *Nahda*, the Arab renaissance. (Fitzgerald 2000)

As Aquinas' disputations in support of the freedom to teach at the University of Paris demonstrate, not all Christian thinkers agreed about the sweet reasonableness of Aristotle's methods. A similar distrust of Aristotelian rationalism can be seen among some Muslim theologians—perhaps most notably in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, a thirteenth-century Arab theologian whose ideas continue to support the fundamentalist Salafi, or Wahhabi traditions in the 21st century. Taymiyya was…

> …a staunch defender of Sunni Islam based on strict adherence to the *Qur'an* and authentic *sunna* (practices) of the Prophet Muhammad. He believed that these two sources contain all the religious and spiritual guidance necessary for our salvation in the hereafter. Thus he rejected the arguments and ideas of both philosophers and Sufis regarding religious knowledge, spiritual experiences and ritual practices. He believed that logic is not a reliable means of attaining religious truth and that the intellect must be subservient to revealed truth. … His challenge to the leading scholars of the day was to return to an understanding of Islam in practice and in faith, based solely on the *Qur'an* and *sunna*. (Pavlin 1998)

Ibn Taymiyya's ideas were in stark contrast to the philosophical view of God as First Cause and as being devoid of attributes. Like some of the Christian voices at the University of Paris, Ibn Taymiyya questioned the limits of human reason in the face of divine revelation. The conflict that he sets up between human reason and Divine will is framed by Plato's question in the *Euthyphro*: assuming that goodness is the will of God, is something good because God wills it, or does God will something because it is good? Aquinas proposed a resolution of this apparent dilemma by asserting the ability of human reason to understand our natures as created beings in a

universe of natural and divine laws. Ibn Taymiyya took the other fork in the road: If Allah wills it (as revealed in the *Qur'an* or *sunna*), then it is good even if it appears to be contradictory to human reason.

> Thus the philosophical argument that the oneness of God precludes a multiplicity of attributes was not acceptable to Ibn Taymiyya, because God says that he is one and that he has various attributes. This denial of the attributes of God based on rationalism was adopted by the Mu'tazila, of whom Ibn Taymiyya was especially critical. Even the more orthodox views of the Ash'aris, who accepted seven attributes basic to God, were criticized by Ibn Taymiyya. However, he did not go so far as to declare these two groups heretical, for they deviated only in their interpretation of God's nature. But he did not spare the label of apostate for those philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. (Pavlin 1998)

The Mu'tazila school of Muslim theology originated in the 8th century in Basra (Iraq). It sought to reconcile reason with Muslim belief—it was at the "reason end" of the faith-reason debate in Islam. On the other side of the issue were the Sufi who followed the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabi concerning the oneness of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*). Sufis believe they are able to effect a merging of their souls with God's essence. That is, when God reveals his truth to an individual, that person realizes that there is no difference between God and the self. The mystical experience of the Sufis took them beyond the realm of intellectual discourse to a merging that could not be expressed rationally. But for Ibn Taymiyya, "…both the philosopher and the mystic were deluded, the former by reliance on a limited human intellect and the latter by excessive emotions. (Pavlin 1998)

Aquinas and Ibn Taymiyya are just two very conspicuous examples of polar positions in the classic debate about the relationship between faith and reason. Just as the Christian Church continued to debate the meanings of various doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation, Islamic theology wrestled with similar questions like whether the *Qur'an* was created or eternal,

whether evil was created by God, predestination versus free will, and whether God's attributes in the *Qur'an* were to be interpreted allegorically or literally.

Unlike the times of the first encounters, in the Middle Ages we find many examples of Christians and Muslims beginning to listen through and to each other. Christian thinkers began to hear from the world of the ancient Greeks and they learn about new contributions by Muslim scholars in areas like medicine and mathematics—through the Latin translations of Muslim scholars. During the first encounters, Christians and Muslims were primarily talking at each other via decrees, letters of demand for surrender, and other similar one-way communications. But beginning about the end of the last crusade against a Muslim land, people in each group begin to listen to the ideas of the "Other." There were many other new inter-group dialogues forming and growing in areas like trade, law, science, and philosophy. Theological dialogues were another matter.

Christian and Muslim theologians did not have very effective dialogue for a long time, and the reason is theological in nature. In contrast to the increase of philosophical and scientific dialogues between Christians and Muslims during the Middle Ages, Richard Fletcher notes:

> There is still strikingly little sign that the learned men of Islam displayed any interest in Christianity as such. Perhaps this is not surprising. The revelation vouchsafed to the Prophet superseded the partial revelations granted to earlier prophets such as Moses or Jesus. There could be no incentive to study the tenets of faiths which had been overtaken and rendered redundant by the fullness of God's revelation. The only occasion for doing so, accordingly, was for the purpose of engaging in polemic. Thus, for example, al-Tabarī used his knowledge of Christianity in composing his apologetic work in defense of Islam in ninth-century Baghdad. (Fletcher 2003, 126)

Following in al-Tabarī's apologetic footsteps, Ibn Hazm of Cordoba (994 – 1064) sets out to refute the claims of Christianity in his *Kitāh al-Fasl* (The Book of the Distinctions in the Religious Heresies and Sects). Again, there is no effort at understanding the Other except for the purposes of argumentation against them.

Many Christian theologians had motives similar to al-Tabarī's and Ibn Hazm's. Their typical motive for attempting to learn Muslim doctrine seems to have been simply to be able to refute their pernicious claims and weak arguments. A case in point was Peter the Venerable, abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Cluny. Abbot Peter engaged the services of two scholars who completed the first translation of the *Qur'an* into Latin about 1143. Unfortunately, the translation was "accompanied by marginal glosses conceived in a hostile and nit-picking spirit." (Fletcher 2003, 128) Using his newly translated *Qur'an*, Abbot Peter composed a work of Christian apologetics whose title speaks for itself: *A Book Against the Abominable Heresy or Sect of the Saracens*.

Nevertheless, by Aquinas' time in the thirteenth century, there was at least the beginning of movement away from the discourses of war against the infidels. According to the biographer of Ramón de Peñafort who resigned his leadership of the Dominican Order to establish schools for the study of Arabic and missionary training, de Peñafort's efforts resulted in 10,000 converts—most probably an inflated figure. (Fletcher 2003, 144) At the Ecumenical Council of Vienne in 1311, Ramón Lull, a Majorcan polymath, persuaded the council to establish schools of oriental studies at the universities of Paris, Oxford, Bologna, and Salamanca. Perhaps a sufficient number of rational debates with the infidels, like the ones that could be found in Lull's *Liber del Gentil e dels Tres Savis* (Book of the Pagan and the Three Sages), could lead the Muslims to discover the true path to salvation?

Stagnation, Separation, and Intimidation

In 1396, the Crusade of Necropolis attempted to halt the advancing Ottoman Turks whose "…self image was as ghazis, frontiersmen on the edge of the *Dar ul-Islam* whose duty it was to extend the scope of the faith by *jihad*." (Fletcher 2003, 135) The crusaders suffered a decisive

defeat and the Ottomans pressed on. In 1453, Constantinople was captured by the Ottomans. In 1477, an Ottoman raid approached the outskirts of Venice, and in 1529 Vienna was besieged. By the end of the sixteenth century, Western Christendom faced the formidable and fierce Ottoman Empire that wrapped around the eastern Mediterranean from Hungary to Libya.

In the face of the Ottoman military threat, some Western Christians attempted to adopt a strategy of polite dialogue. Equipped with the methods of textual study and rhetoric of Renaissance humanism, a few saw a new way forward through polite, reasonable dialogue. Notable in this small group were John of Segovia (d. 1458) and Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464). Assisted by Ysa Yabir of Segovia, John prepared an Arabic-Latin-Castilian version of the *Qur'an* which he envisioned as necessary for peaceful dialogue that would take place at extended academic conferences.

> The spirit of discussion he desired to foster was one which sought points of contact between Christianity and Islam, rather than stressing their differences… Convergence, not divergence, was to be the watchword; and John was convinced that right-intentioned scholars could talk themselves into it…His pupil Hernando de Talavera, first archbishop of reconquered Granada, tried to put John's ideas into practice in his approaches to his Muslim flock after 1492. But his conciliatory policies were brushed aside by the Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain, Cardinal Cisneros, who insisted upon a policy of forced baptism instead…(Fletcher 2003, 147)

Nicholas of Cusa was a very gifted philosopher, theologian, mathematician, and historian. He rose quickly in the Church and was made a cardinal. Pope Pius II, contemplating yet another crusade, asked Nicholas to write something to support his plans. The result must surely have surprised the pope. Nicholas wrote *Cribratio Alcorani* (The Sieving of the *Qur'an*), the main thesis of which was that:

> …if the *Qur'an* is intensively studied in the proper spirit (sieved), it will be found to be compatible with the teachings of Christianity as found in the New Testament. Beneath discrepancies and differences there lay a shared basis of belief. (Fletcher 2003, 148)

Nicholas went another step further in his *Docta Ignorantia* (Learned Ignorance), where he claimed that "ultimate truth" was inaccessible to the human intellect and he seemed to claim that there were ways to God outside of confessional allegiance. If a Christian mystic can encounter God, perhaps a Sufi can too?

But with only a few exceptions like John of Segovia and Nicholas of Cusa, Christian attempts at theological dialogue with Muslims waned and sputtered out. Perhaps the Christians were distracted by their fears and plagues. In 1321, there were…

> …widespread rumors that the emir of Granada and the Mamlūk sultan of Egypt were plotting to poison the wells of France and Spain, using Jews and lepers as their network of agents. A generation later, in 1347-51, the horrendous visitation of the Black Death wiped out perhaps a third of the population of Europe: there were some who blamed it on Muslim agency. (Fletcher 2003, 157)

Perhaps too, the Christians were also distracted by their own ecclesiastical and doctrinal breakdowns in dialogue. On the heels of the Black Death, the Great Schism of Western Christianity between 1378 and 1417 became a spectacle of putative popes simultaneously in Avignon and in Rome. Then, a short hundred years later, the painful time of Reformation set in with Martin Luther's 1517 posting of his controversial theses for the Wittenberg University community.

Yet another probable reason for the decline in Christian interest in theological dialogue was the decline in reliance on the Muslim scholars for their translation services.

> Western Christendom had got all that it needed from the Islamic world. Kick-started by the translators, Western intellectuals could now run on their own. The careers and writings of, say, Arnold (of Vilanova—a prolific scholar and medical practitioner in the early fourteenth century) himself, or of Roger Bacon, exemplify the point. The scientific advances of the later medieval period were self-generated. (Fletcher 2003, 150)

Nonetheless, Christian academic study of the *Dar ul-Islam* still continued. After Gutenberg's Bible was printed in 1455, the emergent scientific method was prompted and

sustained by the new printing presses that revolutionized information transfer. Christians began to build collections of Arabic manuscripts and presses for printing in Arabic script were devised. In contrast, in Constantinople under the Ottomans, Muslims were prohibited from using the new communication technology—under pain of death—because the prevailing opinion of the *ulama* was that it would be a sacrilege to print the *Qur'an* instead of copying it by the hands of scribes. From the Muslim perspective, printing only perpetuated the Christian sectarian divisions that Muslims had long derided.

> …the contrast between the cultures of Christendom and of Islam in this matter of printing carries symbolic weight. The Dar ul-Islam was unwilling to learn from Christendom; the distain which had always been there was as strong as ever. (Fletcher 2003, 150-1)

In the early Abbasid period, Muslim scholars eagerly absorbed the learning of Greek and Persian antiquity. But by the time of the Ottomans, there was considerably less openness to new learning. Beginning in the latter Middle Ages, the Christian West and the Muslim East drifted apart, their cultures of learning and discovery diverged dramatically. And on both sides of the growing cultural/religious divide, there was a failure to try to understand the other—a virtually complete breakdown in intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

> Christians first encountered Muslims: it is readily intelligible that they should have perceived Islam as inherently martial. Given the intellectual and religious climate of the age, the only manner in which Christians could explain Islam in a fashion convincing to themselves was as an aberrant form of Christianity. There you have the two essential ingredients of the Christian image of Islam: Muhammad as a pseudo-prophet, impostor, heretic; his followers as men of blood and violence. (Fletcher 2003, 158)

From the Muslim perspective, Christians appeared to be no more savory than the Muslims seemed to Christians. From the beginning, Muslims possessed the self-confidence of their belief that they had been chosen to receive God's final revelation. Christians were looked upon with scorn—a people occupying a part of the world that Allah clearly had not favored.

> Seen from Baghdad in, say, the year 900, the Christian world was a jumble of confused sects and petty monarchies squirming about in an unappealing environment. The Islamic community had no rival in its wealth, its technology, its learning, and its culture as well as in its faith. A lofty distain was the only intelligible attitude for Muslims to adopt towards Christians. (Fletcher 2003, 159)

By the end of the Middle Ages, Christian Europe had rediscovered Asia and India and had discovered new lands in the Americas and Africa. In a spirit of exploration and expansion, with old political and religious structures being supplanted by new forms of popular government, and propelled by the Enlightenment and the increasingly successful results from the new scientific methods, the Christian West constructed a world order that slowly subordinated and intimidated the world of Islam.

> During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a European world hegemony would be constructed which rested upon economic dominance, institutions of government, military might and mastery of communications. …The Ottoman Empire was the most powerful state in the world in the sixteenth century; by 1800 it continued to exist only because the European powers could not agree about what to put in its place. The *Dar ul-Islam* was bullied, exploited and degraded by the arrogant westerners and experienced its deepest humiliation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This in turn fueled resentments which are still with us. (Fletcher 2003, 159)

Another current observer, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, notes that Islamic states have permitted their Christian citizens a form of freedom of worship in the *ahl al-dhimma*—but a freedom constrained by religious/cultural scorn for the Christian religion.

> The Islamic world and the Western Christian world became two blocs, a division which the Crusades helped to perpetuate. Then the colonial era brought about what could be termed a "love-hate relationship" with the Christian West. Its technical advances were admired, and desired, but its domination was abhorred. There was also the religious factor. Christians did not really have an adequate theological basis for an open relationship with Muslims. Islam tended to be looked upon as a sort of Christian heresy, and Muslims therefore worthy of condemnation. On the other hand, while Islamic society allowed a place for Christians in its system, as *ahl al-dhimma*, it had little sympathy for the specific beliefs of Christians. (Fitzgerald 2000)

The Current Context

The Past 50 Years

Beginning about the middle of the twentieth century, major efforts toward increasing and improving Christian-Muslim dialogue began.

> Organized dialogue between Christians and Muslims, at least in modern times, can perhaps be dated back to 1969. In March of that year the World Council of Churches gathered together in Cartigny (Geneva) about 20 concerned Christians and Muslims to explore the possibilities of dialogue and make plans for the future. This led to an international meeting, held in Broumana (Lebanon) in July 1972, in which 50 people, equally divided between the two religions, took part. The Broumana meeting was followed up by two regional gatherings, one in Accra (Ghana) in July 1974, the other in Hong Kong in January 1975. Mention has already been made of the meetings between the Secretariat for Non Christians and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, in Rome in December 1970, and in Cairo in September 1974. (Fitzgerald 2000)

Racial and religious tensions in the Middle East coupled with the politics of oil made the Christian West more invested in the affairs of Muslim lands. Correspondingly, the obvious scientific and technological developments in the West confused people who had long assumed Islamic superiority. And that dismay was thrown in relief by a backdrop of incessant, graphic, and glittery Western media that offended Muslim pride and sensibilities. With the end of the horrific World War II, the advances of atheistic Communism into traditional Christian and Muslim lands, and the partitioning of Palestine and creation of the state of Israel in 1948, political and economic and religious realities compelled the establishment of new channels and modes for more effective Christians-Muslim dialogue.

The urgency for open and honest dialogue was clear. To get started, it was also clear that each side had to honestly acknowledge their general ignorance and disrespect for each other:

> If Christians today are earnestly invited to renounce the political methods of the Crusades, and of colonial and imperialist enterprises, they must also examine themselves with regard to other errors and injustices if their dialogue with Islam is to be an honest one. In fact, beyond political and economic confrontations, a vast cultural and religious misunderstanding between Christians and Jews has developed in the course of history.

> Each has dramatically ignored the other and each has disregarded the proper value of the other. (Lanfry 1977)

Many new voices began to be heard from both sides of the civilizational divide. In general, both Muslim and Christian intellectuals recognized the critical importance of beginning new and more respectful dialogues. For example, on the Muslim side, there was serious effort to articulate a theological basis for interreligious dialogue—elaborating on issues like the essential dialogical relationship between Christianity and Islam:

> The kind of relationship laid down in the *Qur'an* between Christians and Muslims is fundamentally a dialogical relationship. From chapter to chapter the *Qur'an* engages the Christians in discussion, and all the time insists that Jesus is an integral part of the Muslim faith. The *Qur'an* thus involves Christians in the new faith of Islam, and reminds Muslims that Christians have a special relationship with them. The real dialogue between religions was, however, started by the *Qur'an*. Its recognition of the People of the Book-the believers in God spread all over the earth, the Sabeans and the Jews-was a dialogical recognition. In all such *Qur'anic* discourses it is difficult to miss the deep feeling of Christianity and Islam being present to each other. One is aware of the other's presence. One is aware of strong disagreements. One is aware of deep sharing. What else could signify this deep sharing more than the fact that Jesus is the common center between Christians and Muslims? He is the word, speech, meaning, and occasion of the dialogical relationship between them. He is the common "Sign." (Askari 1972)

On the Christian side, with the impetus of *Nostra Aetate* after Vatican II, the churches began to give considerable new attention and effort to the issue of interreligious dialogue—especially dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Christians began to reflect on their own history with a more critical eye. For example, in two influential texts: *Islam and the West* (1950), and *Islam, Europe and Empire* (1965), Professor Norman Daniel clearly identified many of the false representations of Islam by Western Christians. Daniel's work was itself the impetus for new dialogue in the form of Muslim responses to his findings:

> In the Middle Ages, the scientific and philosophical contribution of the Arabs (Muslims) was clearly paramount, a fact recognized in the West only by a well-informed elite. With a few notable exceptions (Ramon Lull and Thomas Aquinas), it was rare for Christian theologians to ponder the religious abundance of Islam. Professor Norman Daniel [*Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1950), and *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh,

> 1965).] has recently outlined for us the essentials in the false representation of Islam by Western Christians. This is what made Prof. Abd al-Rahman Badaoui respond: "What monstrous slanders and what frightful lies have been heaped upon our Prophet and upon Islam! I myself have seen the disastrous effects, still rooted in the opinions of both simple people and the educated alike.... All sorts of circumstances have contributed to the formation and growth of this misunderstanding: circumstances in the religious, political and even economic sectors... with its origins dating as far back as St. John Damascus." (Lanfry 1977)

By 1981, *Pro Mundi Vita*, an international information and research center under Catholic sponsorship, published *The Muslim-Christian Dialogue of the Last Ten Years.* Here again we see serious effort to articulate new theological understandings for interreligious dialogue According to one knowledgeable observer, the focus of this document…

> …is on the need to appreciate Islam's 'twofold design for temporal civilization and spiritual adventure' in contrast to the way the 'Church has given up its dreams of Christendom in order to be at the exclusive service of the Gospel,' and on problems arising from the resultant differences in attitudes toward religious minorities (depending on which is the dominant tradition in a given place). (Renard 1992)

The volume of interreligious dialogue documents, conferences, symposia, lectures, and other discourses during the final years of the twentieth century is astounding. By way of example, consider the massive, newly published work that collects all papal and Vatican documents on interreligious dialogue from 1963 to 2005:

> Monsignor Felix Machado, undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, presented the 1,766-page volume today. The presentation took place in conjunction with that of the Vatican's message to Muslims at the end of Ramadan. Published by *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* in Italian, French and English, the book is entitled "Interreligious Dialogue in the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from Vatican Council II to John Paul II (1963-2005). (Zenit 2006i)

Other similar compendia of interreligious documentation could be cited here, like *Islamochristiana 25, "...*an impressive collection of essays that focuses on interfaith dialogue, specifically Islamic-Christian dialogue. It includes a copious appendix of notes, documents, and statements…" (Schildgen 2002). But an accurate and complete survey of latter-day interreligious

developments and documentation is, again, beyond the scope of this inquiry. For our purposes here, we can only highlight some of the more prominent, theologically related developments in the timeline below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Timeline of Recent, Major Developments in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

1928 | *Muslim Brotherhood* is founded.

Founded by Hasan al-Banna, an Egyptian thinker. In 2006, many consider this group to be "terrorist friendly."

1930 | *Society of Philanthropic Projects* is formed.

This group is also known as the Ahbash. During the Lebanese civil war, the Ahbash grew from a few hundred members into a large organization by infiltrating the Sunni militias and schools. When 'Abd al-Hafiz Qasim's militia disbanded in 1984, the Ahbash recruited its members into its ranks. However, the Ahbash's main aims were proselytization and recruitment, with a commitment to moderation and political passivity. (Hamzeh 1996, 220)

1950 | *Islam and the West* is published.

A seminal work for interreligious dialogue written by Professor Norman Daniel. This text is considered a "classic study" of the formation and development of Western attitudes about Islam from medieval times to the present.

1964 | *Secretariat for Non Christians* is formed.

Responding to the mandate of the Second Vatican Council, which said the church should enter into "discussions and collaboration with members of other religions," Pope Paul VI instituted a special department of the Roman Curia for relations with people of other religions.

1965 | *Nostra Aetate* is published.

(In Our Times) Ecumenical decree of Vatican Council II

1965 | *Islam, Europe and Empire* is published.

A study in the encounters and clashes of cultures and values and then of imperialism and colonialism authored by Professor Norman Daniel.. Daniel critiques Europe's distorted perceptions of Muslims and how European attitudes toward Islam were subsequently extended to other peoples and cultures.

1969 | *Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians* is published.

Published by the Vatican's Secretariat for Non Christians. (Cuoq 1969)

1969 | Landmark meetings between Muslims and Christians in Cartigny, Switzerland.

Sponsored by the World Council of Churches.

1971 | *Sub-unit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* is established.

Established by the World Council of Churches.

1974 | *The Commission for Religious Relations With the Muslims* is established.

Pope Paul VI established this group within the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians. (Thavis 2006)

Table 1. Timeline of Recent, Major Developments in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

1976 | Seminar on Islamic-Christian Dialogue in Tripoli, Libya

Colonel Kaddafi, the seminar's organizer, extended invitations to Christians and directly to the Vatican itself in to initiate dialogue with Muslims. He hoped for a tripartite meeting of Jews, Christians and Muslims on the religious questions, but the Tripoli seminar was only a two-party meeting. (Lanfry 1977)

1976 | *A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their Relations with Muslim Communities* is published (Brown 1976)

This document "…gives a very sketchy summary of Islamic religious tenets, of Islam's geographical spread and ethnic diversity, and of the principal subgroups within the larger community of Muslims. Following that is a similarly skeletal outline of Christian-Muslim interaction century by century, with a short inventory of "the main factors which must be considered in any assessment of relationships between the two religious in this modern age." (Renard 1992)

1977 | *Christians Meeting Muslims: WCC Papers on Ten Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue* is published. (World Council of Churches 1977)

This collection of theological papers "…offers an anthology of fourteen relatively brief 'reflections, statements, memoranda of ten years of Christian-Muslim dialogue,' plus an introduction." (Renard 1992)

1977 | *Task Force on Christian-Muslim Relations* is formed.

Created by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

1979 | *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* is published

Published by the World Council of Churches in Chiang Mai, China.

1981 | *The Muslim-Christian Dialogue of the Last Ten Years* is published (Borromans 1981a)

This document "…attempts a critical analysis, a 'rough balance-sheet of this decade of encounters and colloquia, in order to evaluate successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses.' …Borrmans sounds hopeful but is quite frank in his criticisms." (Renard 1992)

1981 | *Orientations pour un dialogue entre Chretiens et Musulmans (Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians)* is published (Borrmans 1981b)

This document is a substantial—almost total-rewriting of its predecessor: the Vatican Secretariat's *Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians*—1969. These two guidelines documents take their point of departure by asserting that simple tolerance and mere coexistence are no longer sufficient to maintain peace in the world. (Renard 1992)

1983 | *Christian-Muslim Relations. An Introduction for Christians in the United States of America* is published. (Speight 1983)

This document's author, R. Marston Speight, acknowledges that "the image projected by Islam upon the imagination of the average American is one of an intolerant, legalistic and fatalistic religion practiced by backward, ferocious and scheming people." (Renard 1992)

Table 1. Timeline of Recent, Major Developments in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

1984 | *Reflections on Dialogue and Mission* is published

Published by the Vatican's Secretariat for Non Christians. The objective of this document is "...to show how the interreligious dialogue has its own place among the basic elements of the mission of the Church… The dialogue comes from the Father, it is expressed in the Word made flesh and is present through the work of the Holy Spirit." (Fitzgerald and Machado 2003)

1985 | Pope John Paul II visits Morocco

The pope addressed a large gathering of Muslim youth. (Fitzgerald 2000)

1986 | *World Day of Prayer for Peace* convoked by Pope John Paul II in Assisi, Italy.

This was an unprecedented gathering, alongside the pope, of representatives of the great world religions, from the Dalai Lama to the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury. "A number of Muslims accepted the invitation." (Fitzgerald 2000)

1988 | *The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (PCID) is formed.

The former Secretariat for Non Christians is renamed and reorganized.

1991 | *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* is published.

Published by the respective dicasteries of the Roman Curia some months after *Redemptoris Missio*, the missionary encyclical of Pope John Paul II. This document "…was the fruit of collaborative work with the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Towns. The first part indicates briefly how the Bible can offer a justification for dialogue; the next section covers the different alliances between God and humanity, with Noah, Abraham, Moses; and finally, the New Alliance in Jesus Christ." (Fitzgerald and Machado 2003)

1993 | *Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, and Encounter with Religions* meeting held.

The PCID organized this colloquium in Pune, India. "The invited theologians came from four different continents and represented varying backgrounds, reflecting the concerns of their respective local churches, and also their particular field of work..." (Machado 2001)

1995 | *Islamo-Christian Encounters* published.

The Institute for Muslim Christian Studies at the University of St. Joseph published a collection of all documentation of Islamo-Christian Encounters. (Haddad 1995)

1996 | Pope John Paul II visits Tunis

The pope laid special emphasis on dialogue within the Mediterranean area. (Fitzgerald 2000)

1996 | *The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Encounter with Traditional Religions* meeting held.

The PCID organized an international colloquium in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. "Twenty-seven experts from all five continents were invited. Cardinal Arinze, President of PCID, said in his opening speech: (the Colloquium is a gathering of theologians) 'to reflect on what Christianity has to say to people of the Traditional

Table 1. Timeline of Recent, Major Developments in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Religions, especially those of them who have become Christians.'" (Machado 2001

1999 | *On the Eve of the Third Millennium: Collaboration among Different Religions* meeting held.

The PCID organized this interreligious assembly. About 200 people, from 20 religious traditions participated. (Machado 2001)

2003 | Guidelines for Christian-Muslim Dialogue proposed by IRD and NAE

Proposed in Washington, D.C. at a meeting convened by evangelical leaders of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). In evaluating these guidelines, Charles Kimball, professor and chair of the department of religion at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., said "the result is a fundamentally flawed set of guidelines." (Public Broadcasting Service 2003)

2004 | Week-long Conference convened by the Parliament of World's Religions (PWR)

Held in Barcelona, Spain. PWR, a Chicago, IL-based organization, invited about 6,500 religious leaders, activists and followers of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam to the assembly. "Spain was chosen in 2002 as the venue for the parliament, long before the March 11 attacks in Madrid, when Islamic terrorists blew up four packed commuter trains, killing 190 people. The explosions, the worst in Europe in 15 years, make Barcelona an appropriate place for discussing Islam and violence in religion. (Abdo 2004)

***2006* | *The Religious Sense* is published in an Arabic translation.**

By Monsignor Luigi Giussani. (Zenit 2006h)

2006 | Religions and Cultures in Dialogue for a World of Peace meeting held.

Interreligious world meeting and of the day of prayer for peace promoted by the Sant'Egidio Community and the Umbrian bishops' conference.

2006 | *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections* lecture is given.

In a 9-12-2006 meeting with representatives of science at the University of Regensburg in Germany, Pope Benedict XVI gave this lecture; it included a quote from the 14th-century Byzantine Emperor Manual II Paleologos that was critical of Islam.

2006 | ZENIT begins Arabic language service.

This international Catholic news service launched an Arabic edition in collaboration with Vatican Radio's Arabic program, and with *Oasis*, a review of the

Table 1. Timeline of Recent, Major Developments in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Patriarchate of Venice.

2006 | Pope Benedict XVI visits Turkey.

The main goal of this four-day apostolic trip to Turkey was to promote unity with Islam and the Orthodox. Whether this goal was achieved remains to be seen in the next few years.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 marked an ominous turning point in Christian-Muslim relations at the turn of the new century. Triggered by nineteen radical Saudi Arabian and Egyptian Muslims, these events reinforced old religious and cultural stereotypes and ignited new fears.

> The shock of these events—the first overt large-scale attack on the continental United States since the War of 1812—was very great both within and without the United States. Out of this has come widespread knowledge of a world-wide network of Muslim terrorist activity, called al-Qaeda (the Base), aimed at the United States and, more generally the entire Western World. (Drummond 2005, ix)

After the pivot event of "9-11," perhaps it was not too surprising to hear voices of suspicion and outright venom—in both Muslim and Christian quarters. Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda and a former citizen of Saudi Aribia—a land where bin Laden was influenced by the harsh, puritanical Wahabi sect—revived the term *Crusader* in his theological/political rants. Other Muslims also said some harsh and hostile things about the West and its distorted "Christian" values.

In some fundamentalist, evangelical Christian churches, some interpretations of 9-11 were also harsh and hostile. Referring to a Good Friday sermon preached by Franklin Graham at the U.S. Pentagon, a reporter notes:

> Shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks, Franklin Graham called Islam a "wicked" and "very evil" religion. Other evangelical leaders, including Jerry Falwell, Pat

> Robertson, and former Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Jerry Vines, have also criticized Islam or its founder, Muhammad. (Stricherz 2003)

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which represents 43,000 churches, and the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) hastily convened a forum in Washington, D.C. after the media questioned the appearance of Franklin Graham at the Pentagon. The NAE and IRD forum called on Christian leaders to…

> …tone down their language and talk with Islamic leaders. At the same time, it urges Christians to avoid "pretending" the two religions are the same. It also frowns on setting up interfaith organizations or worship services. (Stricherz 2003)

At this forum, the NAE and IRD also proposed *Guidelines for Christian-Muslim Dialogue*—a document that returned primarily to the teaching mode of dialogue that Swidler thought had been eclipsed. (Swidler 1992)

> The tone of this document can be gauged by a statement made early on: “It is our hope that numbers of Muslims would be persuaded by the testimony of Christians whom they encounter.” (Wisdom 2005)

Another report on these regressive *Guidelines* questions whether the IRD should have first considered the question of dialogue among serious, committed Christians of different sects:

> The problems begin to appear as strict limitations are encouraged on issues of orthodox Christian doctrine and the ultimate aims of dialogue. While strong emphasis is placed on the need to engage "all varieties and stations of Muslims," apparently all varieties and stations of Christians are not welcome at the table, only those with "a firm grasp of an orthodox faith in the mainstream of the Christian tradition." Presumably, the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) is prepared to define who can "represent" Christianity. Do Quakers, Coptic Orthodox, Disciples of Christ, Methodists or National Baptists need apply? (Public Broadcasting Service 2003)

The reactionary *Guidelines* from the NAE and IRD even questioned the merit of the contemporary efforts at Christian-Muslim dialogue:

> Directly and indirectly, the document is clearly critical of the many years of intentional dialogue undertaken by various denominational groups -- local, regional and national ecumenical organizations and international bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the Vatican's Pontifical Council. (Public Broadcasting Service 2003)

Even more intolerant and strident voices can be heard. Consider this book review of Robert Spencer's book *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)*:

> Robert Spencer reveals all the disturbing facts about Islam and its murderous hostility to the West that other books ignore, soft-pedal -- or simply lie about. This book is a unique guide to the bloody teachings and history of Islam, and to the Crusades that still stand today as the Western world's most sustained and successful defense against the warrior hordes who were inspired by those teachings. Exposing myth after myth of the "Islam means peace" establishment, Spencer…tackles all the hot-button issues regarding Islam and the Crusades. …He maintains that we will not be able to defeat today's Islamic *jihad* without recovering pride in the *superiority*—yes, superiority—of Western, Christian civilization. (WorldNetDaily Book Service circa 2005)

Muslim Perspectives on Current Efforts in Dialogue

Both Muslims and Christians attest to the renaissance in interreligious dialogue beginning in the mid-twentieth century.

> Basic theological and ethical issues have been discussed in many different venues and with increasing volume over the past 25 years. (Braibanti 1999. 6)

In 1968, referring to the history of Christian-Muslim relations, Al Faruqi wrote that it:

> …may now be read in the erudite works of Norman Daniel. The reading is sad and agonizing. The conclusion which may be safely drawn from this history is that Christianity's involvement with the Muslim World was so full of misunderstanding, prejudice, and hostility that it has warped the Western Christian's will and consciousness. "Would to God Christianity had never met Islam!" will reverberate in the mind of any student patient enough to peruse that history. On the other side, Muslim-Christian relations have been determined by the *Qur'an*. Doctrinally, therefore, these relations have seen no change. (Al Faruqi 1968)

Al Faruqi even argued that renewed dialogue would somehow have to return to the Council of Nicea as its point of departure:

> Assuming the Council of Nicaea consisted of God as chairman, His angels and prophets as members, and that it did unanimously and under express divine command decide for all eternity what it did decide, what use can we make of what you or any other religion has to offer? The Muslim retort is that it is precisely here in the Nicene Council that the dialogue will have to start, if at all, assuming that the council is still on and deliberating. Consisting of men with holy as well as unholy motives and presided over by a pagan emperor interested in the political unity of the Empire more than in the truth, the council is either closed and hence only of didactic value to modern man, or open and

> modern man may participate therein as constituent member. It was precisely at Nicaea that the split of Christianity into Eastern and Western formally began, not in the meaning usually attached to these terms as denoting the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church, or the Churches of the West as distinguished from those of the East, but in the older sense of a Semitic Christianity of so-called "heretic' churches of the East and a Christianity figurized under terms supplied by Hellenistic consciousness. Only at "Nicaea" can the dialogue with Islam, the heir of that Eastern Christianity which was hereticated (sic.) at Nicaea, be resumed. (Al Faruqi 1968)

Guidelines and Suggestions for Dialogue Proposed by Muslims

Al Faruqi states that "…dialogue is necessary and desirable…its final effect should be the establishment of truth and its serious, free, candid and conscious acceptance by all men." He proposes six "specific principles of methodology" or guidelines which will "…guarantee its meaningfulness and guard against its degeneration into propaganda, brainwashing or soul-purchasing." (Al Faruqi 1968) Here is an outline of his proposals (see Table 2).

Table 2. Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue
Al Faruqi

1. No communication of any sort may be made *ex cathedra*, beyond critique. No man may speak with silencing authority.
2. No communication may violate the laws of internal coherence. Paradox is legitimate only when it is not final, and the principle overarching thesis and antithesis is given. Otherwise, discourse will issue in unintelligible riddles.
3. No communication may violate the laws of external coherence; that is to say, man's religious history.
4. No communication may violate the law of correspondence with reality, but should be open to corroboration or refutation by reality.
5. Dialogue presupposes an attitude of freedom vis-à-vis the canonical figurization. Jesus is a point at which the Christian has contact with God. Through him, God has sent down a revelation. Just as this revelation had to have its carrier in Jesus, it had to have a space-time circumstance in the historical development of Israel. Equally, Muhammad, the Prophet, is a point at which the Muslim has contact with God Who sent a revelation through him.
6. In the circumstances in which the Muslims and Christians find themselves today, primacy belongs to the ethical questions, not the theological.

Nasr notes fewer dialogues with conservative Christians compared with 'liberal' Christians:

> …much less dialogue between Islam and those elements of Christianity which have been theologically much more conservative such as traditional Catholicism, conservative Protestantism, and Orthodoxy than with the more 'liberal' segments of the Christian community. In the last few years, however, an important number of dialogues have taken place between both Russian and Greek Orthodoxy and Islam and continue to do so. (Nasr 1998, 27)

Braibanti recognizes how evangelical Protestant fundamentalism does not follow the same "dialogue agenda" as the Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants:

> The new vision projected by *Nostra Aetate* resonates in mainline Protestantism as is evidenced in the statement of policy adopted by the National Council of Churches in 1980. An exception is evangelical Protestant fundamentalism with its insistence on biblical inerrancy and correlative beliefs in the literalness of Old Testament prophecy and millenarianism. (Braibanti 1999. 13-14)

In evaluating the previously mentioned *Guidelines for Christian-Muslim Dialogue* proposed in 2003 by the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Omid Safi, an assistant professor of philosophy and religion at Colgate University and the editor of *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* notes:

> In a time of so much tension and misunderstanding -- even hatred -- between the U.S. and the Muslim world, there is an urgent need for programs that foster a genuine sense of religious pluralism -- that engage the humanity of participants in all faith traditions without ignoring either the commonalities or differences. The evangelical guidelines for Christian-Muslim dialogue, from their very conception, are doomed to fail in that regard. The goals are clearly elsewhere -- not in dialogue, but in conversion. In what sense would a gathering according to the guidelines constitute a "dialogue"? What practicing Muslim would want to walk into a situation that can only be described as a "faith ambush"? To have a dialogue, one must be willing to listen, to empathize, to engage the humanity of others as our own. The guidelines are no call for "Christian-Muslim dialogue"; they are an outright attempt at evangelical missionary activity. If that is what it is, let's call it that. (Public Broadcasting Service 2003)

Omid Safi continues this scathing critique of the fundamentalist evangelical IRD's and NAE's quidelines by noting that "…the agenda of the group proposing the guidelines clearly overlaps with the political aims of neoconservatism -- a complicated movement that has managed to make

for some strange bedfellows." Safi drills further by tracing the intellectual heritage of the IRD's and NAE's quidelines:

> And the guidelines pay tribute to Princeton historian Bernard Lewis, the designated Islamicist for neocons who has worked closely with Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Vice President Dick Cheney and others, and the author of titles such as "What Went Wrong," "The Crisis of Islam," and "The Roots of Muslim Rage" (adopted by Harvard government professor Samuel Huntington, who wrote "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order"). Lewis's tired rants against Islam and modern Muslims deserve a serious critique, not an unquestioned bow. (Public Broadcasting Service 2003)

He continues by noting how Muslim perceptions are being shaped by current geopolitical events:

> Many in the Muslim world are likely to see the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan through the lens of Western colonialism tainted with religious zealotry. Muslims point to President Bush's association with right-wing Christian speakers such as Franklin Graham, who has publicly called Islam an evil and wicked religion. They point to the Southern Baptist Convention being prepared to send some 35,000 missionaries to Iraq. Guidelines like these only serve to support that paranoia about the "crusader" mentality of the U.S., something that I would want to replace by a more humanistic gathering of Muslims, Jews, Christians, atheists, etc. who would frankly and non-apologetically deal with the violations of human rights in all faith communities and aim to use religious traditions not to divide humanity, but to uplift all of us to our highest potential. (Public Broadcasting Service 2003)

Certainly, not all guidelines for dialogue that have been proposed by Muslims have been formalized, published lists like Al Faruqi's above. We must also note how *de facto* guidelines are often articulated in popular protests to public offenses. In this regard, a prime and recent example is the set of anti-Muslim cartoons published in the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005. These cartoons sparked an unprecedented wave of protests and boycotts across the Islamic world—generating new clarifications or guidelines for the exercise of free-speech rights in matters related to religious sensibilities. Gihan Shahine reported on the possibility of dialogue after the cartoons appeared:

> The idea of promoting dialogue with the Danes even though the Danish government insists it will not apologize for the cartoons which lampooned Prophet Mohamed, has been a bone of contention among Islamic scholars. More than 40 Islamic

> scholars including Egypt's Mufti, Ali Gomaa have pledged support for an initiative by Islamic preacher Amr Khaled for an inter-faith conference in Denmark where carefully chosen Muslim youths will engage in a dialogue with their Danish peers and intellectuals on 8 March [2006]. Others, however, insist an official Danish apology should be obtained first…Qatar-based Egyptian Islamic scholar Sheikh Youssef El-Qaradawi, who heads the European Council on Fatwa and Research, argues that dialogue is an unwanted compromise for the time being. (Shahine 2006**)**

Islamic scholar Sheikh Youssef El-Qaradawi was not the only voice of dissent. Shahine quotes Ahmed Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna, a member of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood who similarly argued…

> …voices should rise even higher and shake the world with protests against the intentional insults of the Muslims' most beloved prophet…The cartoons were meant as a test balloon for how Muslims would react if their sanctuaries are desecrated and their Aqsa Mosque razed…We have to show that Muslims will not stand with fettered hands. (Shahine 2006)

Another voice of tepid support for Dane-Muslim dialogue at this point in history was Abla El-Kahlawi, dean of Islamic Studies for girls at Al-Azhar University. According to Shahine:

> El-Kahlawi said that promoting dialogue with Danish youths and intellectuals "does not mean we are compromising Muslims' rights or ending public protests and boycotts… There are those who are trying to stigmatize all Muslims as terrorists incapable of democratic dialogue. We all have to move in more than one sphere to address this crisis." (Shahine 2006)

Relating the Danish cartoon incident to the 9-11 "incident," Tareq Ramadan, a prominent Islamic thinker, also warned that the Danish cartoons could have "a more long-term" impact than what happened with 11 September:

> "After 11 September, we were speaking about radicals condemned by all Muslims except those on the farthest of margins," explained Ramadan, who is a member of the Muslim task force created after the 7 July London bomb attacks last year. "Now what you have is Muslims, including non-practicing Muslims, reacting and saying there is a problem here in the West and the fracture is deeper." (Shahine 2006)

Shahine reported that both Tareq Ramadan and Amr Khaled warned that both Muslims and Westerners were likely to lose without dialogue that moves beyond mere toleration to an attitude of genuine respect:

> "We [Muslims and Westerners] are both nurturing the victim mentality and we now have virtual walls between us," Ramadan told the *Sunday Herald*. "We are tolerating but not respecting each other. A clash of civilizations is the end and all of us are going to lose." (Shahine 2006)

Among contemporary Muslims, Fethullah Gülen may be a good intellectual partner for Christians engaged in dialogue with Islam:

> …the most interesting thing about Gülen's writings is not his originality, but the way in which he combines the wisdom of mystical and exegetical traditions of Islam with references to Western philosophers and theologians. Fethullah Gülen has written about dialogue many times, so much so that one of volumes in which his writings have been collected, is entitled *Advocate of Dialogue*. Among these writings, Gülen's essay on 'The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue' is of paramount importance, since it has been presented at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1999 and has subsequently been published in English versions several times…In the introduction, Gülen argues that dialogue between Christians and Muslims is indispensable in view of the now prevailing materialist worldview. He points to a Muslim *hadith* that says that Jesus will return during the last days, which means that the central values of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as prophetic traditions will in the end prevail. (Valkenberg 2005, 3**)**

Can the approach of a Muslim like Gülen begin to bridge the growing gulf between Muslims (especially in the Middle East and Asia) and Christians (especially in Europe and America). Even before 9-11, the prospects for this did not seem strong considering the increasing number of Muslims who became hardened toward Christians.

> The Muslim attitude has hardened because of attacks against them by Christian missionaries, Western cultural secularism, capitalist global economics , and, most recently and vividly, by US-led invasions and/or occupations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Qatar, and other Islamic countries. (Nasr 1998, 6)

Earlier generations of Muslims had been more respectful of the religions of the "People of the Book;" they broadly acknowledged that earnest Jews and Christians could also be led to

salvation. Now, especially after 9-11 and the backlash in Iraq and Lebanon, an increasing number of Muslims were becoming radicalized—promoting the idea that all non-Muslims are *kāfir* in the theological sense—condemned to eternal damnation.

Christian Perspectives on Current Efforts in Dialogue

Many Christian theologians, historians, exegetes, philosophers, legal scholars, and others, have labored—especially in recent years—to reacquaint Christians with Muslims.

> There has been no lack of books and reviews on the subject, in which such men as Massignon, Montgomery Watt, Asin y Palacios, Gardet, Anawati, Jomier, Hayek, Moubarac, and many others have placed their learning and skill at the service of better dialogue. Is it not first necessary, after all, to provide Christians with a scientifically exact and religiously sympathetic acquaintance with Islam and Muslims? Several Catholic theological faculties, especially in Rome at the present, include instruction at university level on "the religious reality" throughout the world, with a more or less important place given to Islam. The professors strive to present the Islamic religion to Christians in a way recognizable to Muslims by having recourse to the *Qur'an* and to the classical works of the Muslims themselves. (Lanfry 1977)

From an opening statement in *A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their Relations with Muslim Communities* from the British Council of Churches in 1976, author David Brown asserts:

> The blunt fact is that the Churches in Britain are ill-prepared to discuss the theological questions raised by the existence of other faiths, simply because they have hitherto paid little attention to them. Christian theology has been written by and large, and even within the universities, as if other faiths had nothing to teach them about the relationship of God with his world. It will take some years for the theologians and governing bodies of our Churches to adjust to the realities and perspectives of the pluralist society which Britain, in common with the rest of the world, is rapidly becoming. (Renard 1992)

By the end of the twentieth century, Christian theologians were beginning to talk about a "theology of religions" as a new framework for understanding interreligious dialogue. Commenting on Brown's opening remarks in *A New Threshold*, Renard notes: "Author David

Brown's observations are clearly applicable to churches all over the globe, which is all the more reason for him to make his rather bold proposal for a "theology of religions." (Renard 1992)

By the end of the twentieth century, Christian theologians also recognized that they needed to make a fresh start in dialogue. Referring to its document *Ecumenical Considerations on Christian-Muslim Relations*, the World Council of Churches notes:

> Christian-Muslim relations have a complex history sometimes marked by rivalry or war, but equally in many cases—though frequently forgotten—characterized by constructive living together. A striking feature of our historical memories has been the way in which conflicts overshadow the peaceful experiences. This has been paralleled at the level of theological thinking, where polemics drown the voices of frank and honest interchange. (World Council of Churches 1999)

Moreover, the problems with previous dialogues were not simply due to their tendency toward polemics, there was also evidence of intellectual dishonesty:

> In the process of rethinking their approach to Islam, many Christians accept that much that has passed for "objective scholarship" in past years was not free of bias and untruth. More recently still, during the last twenty-five years, dialogue between Christians and Muslims, such as that initiated by the World Council of Churches and the Vatican, as well as Muslim organizations at both international and national levels, has seen the beginning of a new understanding based on a reciprocal willingness to listen and learn." (World Council of Churches 1999)

For Catholic Christians, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), marked a new beginning in Christian-Muslim relations. This council engendered a new attitude towards the followers of other religions in general, and towards Muslims in particular. *Nostra Aetate*, the council's declaration on the relationship of the Church towards other religions, states that the Church has "a high regard" for Muslims. The declaration continues:

> Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values. (Fitzgerald 2000)

Hans Küng, speaking at a symposium at Temple University about 1987 (before the last war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006), laments the slow start in Christian-Muslim dialogue in modern times:

> It was the centennial of the American University in Beirut, almost twenty years ago, to which I was invited, along with Cardinal Willebrands, head of the Roman Secretariat for Christian Unity, and Dr. Visser't Hooft, then secretary general and now honorary president of the World Council of Churches….Today I am convinced that if a serious dialogue between Christians and Muslims would have been started twenty years ago, Muslims (who were already *then* practically the majority in Lebanon) would have long since received the rights that are still being fought over after thousands and thousands of victims. I think Lebanon could have remained what it was then called-"the Switzerland of the Near East"-a beautiful, happy country, whereas today many sections of the capital are destroyed, hostility is rife, and much of the land is occupied by Syrians, Palestinians, and Israelis—a real catastrophe. (Küng 1987, 161)

According to Küng, a realistic assessment of interreligious dialogue involves understanding that religious conflicts can easily lead to fanaticism:

> Thus, when we speak about interreligious dialogue, it is not just a matter of a few theologians debating some abstract questions. I am convinced that the Vietnam war was, behind the scenes, also heavily grounded in religious antagonism, in that case between Buddhists—Buddhist monks especially—and the Catholic regime of Diem and his princes, together with the colonial powers. And I am also convinced that the antagonism between India and Pakistan, the war between Iraq and Iran, and the whole situation in the Middle East are largely grounded in religious antagonism. I am, of course, well aware that these conflicts are not just a matter of religion;, there are also political, military, economic, and social aspects. Yet battles and wars become fanatical when they have a religious base. We in Europe have enough experience of what it means to conduct "religious wars." (Küng 1987, 161)

But when it came to the question of the relative parity of representation in these dialogues, one credible observer noted a serious imbalance. Referring to the 1968 issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (JES), Leonard Swidler wrote:

> It was not easy, however, to find Muslim Islamicist scholars who were willing to enter openly into dialogue with critical-thinking non-Muslim religious scholars. Modern critical-thinking, religiously knowledgeable and committed Muslims open to interreligious dialogue seemed to be in extremely short supply in the world. It seems that they began to appear-or develope-in the last decade or so. This fact is reflected in the appearance of only a single additional JES article by a Muslim until 1977—and it must

> be remembered that JES had been judged in a worldwide survey of all the institutions devoted to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue as far and away the most valuable publication to them in any language…A perusal of the many hundreds of book reviews during these years and the even more hundreds of articles summarized in JES dealing with interreligious dialogue corroborates the dearth of Muslims involved in interreligious dialogue. However, in the past dozen years, despite, or perhaps ironically partly because of Khomeini, Muslim scholars have been increasingly participating in interreligious dialogue. This has also begun to happen on the grass-roots level as well. (Swidler 1992)

In a his *Christian Muslim Dialogue—A Survey of Recent Developments*, Michael Fitzgerald observes the same phenomenon:

> Now during this time complaints were being voiced on the Christian side deploring Muslim passivity. All the initiatives seemed to be coming from the Christian side, but it was felt that dialogue should not be one-way. Such a situation provoked some Muslim university lecturers in Tunisia into launching a series of Christian-Muslim encounters. The organizational burden was carried by the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economiques et Sociales* (C.E.R.E.S.) in Tunis. Starting in 1974 five encounters were held. The first of these took as its theme "Muslim and Christian Responsibility faced with the Problem of Development". The choice of topic is interesting. It was deliberately oriented to a domain which would provide a possibility for a common search for solutions, rather than one which would arouse confrontation. (Fitzgerald 2000)

Noting that most of these C.E.R.E.S. meetings were with Sunni Muslims, Fitzgerald draws special attention to a colloquium held in 1994 in Teheran (capital of Iran, a country of predominantly *Shi'a* Muslims):

> This was organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue with the Secretariat of Interreligious Dialogue of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Teheran. The topic addressed was a theological evaluation of modernity. The Iranians have also been in dialogue with Greek Orthodox, with the German Evangelical Church, and with the World Council of Churches. Most recently, in December 1998, a consultation was held in Turin under the auspices of the Agnelli Foundation. (Fitzgerald 2000)

A World Council of Churches meeting in Tripoli (1976), produced a *Charter for Muslim-Christian Dialogue Today* (see Table 3). Maurice Borrmans quotes it as the "charter for Muslim-Christian dialogue today" in *The Muslim-Christian Dialogue of the Last Ten Years.* (Renard 1992)

Table 3. Charter for Muslim-Christian Dialogue Today
World Council of Churches

1. To learn the lessons taught by history in order to retain the fruitful experiences and to avoid the errors of the past.
2. To see to it that each side comes to know the other as it wants to be known: revision of textbooks, utilization of the mass media, increase in the number of professorships in Islam and Christianity, and cooperation between them.
3. To be fair enough, on either side, to guarantee to all religious minorities all the rights and obligations the majority enjoys.
4. To recognize each religion's "duty of apostolate" and the authentic witness each must give, while respecting human liberty-which involves condemnation of any kind of proselytism.
5. To define more clearly the exact scope and methods of dialogue.

From a Christian perspective, several suggestions have been made for developing better relations between Christians and Muslims. For example, Cardinal Arinze (Arinze 1998, 2-7), notes several practical actions that can be taken (see Table 4).

Table 4. Practical Steps Toward Better Interreligious Relations
Cardinal Francis Arinze

1. Better knowledge of the other
2. Acceptance of the other and respect for differences
3. Actual engagement in dialogue
4. Joint witness to shared values
5. Joint promotion of peace

Addressing the third practical step that Arinze notes, the PCID formed two joint committees with Muslims (see Table 5). Especially seeking to foster continuity in dialogue, the plan was for annual meetings. (Fitzgerald 2000)

Table 5. PCID's Joint Committees with Muslims
Michael Fitzgerald

Committees	**Muslim Participants**
1995: Catholic-Muslim Liaison Committee (CMLC)	▪ World Muslim Congress ▪ World Muslim League ▪ International Islamic Committee for *Da'wah* and Humanitarian Relief ▪ Islamic Economic Social and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), one of the organs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference
1998: Special Joint Committee with Al-Azhar (SJCA)	▪ Al-Azhar University: Permanent Committee for Dialogue with Monotheistic Religions. Delegates from Al-Azhar had been present in 1995 when the CMLC committee was formed. (Machado 2001)

In an address that Pope John Paul II delivered during his ground-breaking visit to the Umayyad Mosque in 2001, he predicted that better mutual understanding through dialogue and a spirit of forgiveness would lead to a new paradigm of partnership:

> I truly hope that our meeting today in the Umayyad Mosque will signal our determination to advance interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church and Islam. This dialogue has gained momentum in recent decades; and today we can be grateful for the road we have traveled together so far…It is important that Muslims and Christians continue to explore philosophical and theological questions together, in order to come to a more objective and comprehensive knowledge of each others' religious beliefs. Better mutual understanding will surely lead, at the practical level, to a new way of presenting

> our two religions not in opposition, as has happened too often in the past, but in partnership for the good of the human family. (John Paul II 2001)

In addition to the Catholic-Muslim dialogues, Fitzgerald notes other Christian-Muslim "structures for dialogue." He cites two examples, referring first to a joint Christian-Muslim dialogue group in Lebanon:

> An interesting feature of this body is that, on the Christian side, it includes representatives of the different Churches, and on the Muslim side representatives of the *Sunni*, *Shi'a*, and Druze communities. The Middle East Council of Churches has also been instrumental in setting up a Christian-Muslim dialogue group covering the whole of the Middle East." (Fitzgerald 2000)

Speaking in 2001, Felix Machado observed that the Catholic Church had made significant overtures in Muslim-Christian dialogue—overtures that were not to be interpreted as doctrinal compromise:

> In spite of the many inevitable difficulties, Muslim-Christian dialogue has received increasing attention from the Catholic Church in the past 10 years. The Holy Father himself has been the pioneer in manifesting respect and esteem towards the Muslims and their religious tradition, on the one hand, and uncompromising in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, on the other hand. Special mention must be made of his visits to Al Azhar, Cairo, Egypt, in February 2000 and to the traditionally venerated Tomb of St John the Baptist in the Omayyad Mosque in Damascus in May 2001. (Machado 2001)

In 2002, in a post-9-11 world, the World Council of Churches issued a statement that put heavy emphasis on the importance of commitment to faith—without necessarily identifying with what has been done in the name of a particular faith group. The statement can be viewed as an attempt by mainline Protestant churches to distance themselves from radical evangelical groups and from various Christian denominations that have historically fallen short in some regard (e.g., the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches). Simultaneously, their discourse is a reminder that Christians should not consider Islam to be a monolithic bloc. Just as Christians are

not to be judged by the actions and statements of groups like the IRD, or NAE, or the Church of the Crusades, so too, Muslims are not to be judged by the actions of a group like al-Qaeda:

> Although dialogue by its very nature is direct encounter, there are invisible participants on each side in every dialogue. Our dialogue partners will every so often hold us responsible for what fellow Christians have done or neglected to do, said or not said. While this in some ways is inevitable and even sometimes understandable, we are well aware of deep disagreements within religions and we know that the dividing lines do not always go between religious communities but often within religious communities. The differences may be not only theological, but relate to social, political, and moral issues. We may for various reasons find ourselves in opposition to some of those with whom we share a common faith. We learn that religious communities are not monolithic blocks confronting each other. Plurality of positions on each side should not be ignored or suppressed while defending what is perceived to be the interest of one's community. Commitment to a faith does not entail identification with what is done or not done in its name. Therefore, we should not be defensive, but remain confident of the potential of dialogue to changing deeply held opinions or prejudices. (World Council of Churches 2002)

Following in the footsteps of John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, at the very beginning of his pontificate, clearly states the Catholic Church's support for dialogue and cooperation in efforts that serve justice and peace. He sets the context for his call to cooperation as the common faith heritage of the three Abrahamic religions:

> Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe in the one God, Creator of heaven and earth. It follows, therefore, that all three monotheistic religions are called to cooperate with one another for the common good of humanity, serving the cause of justice and peace in the world. This is especially important today when particular attention must be given to teaching respect for God, for religions and their symbols, and for holy sites and places of worship. Religious leaders have a responsibility to work for reconciliation through genuine dialogue and acts of human solidarity." (Benedict XVI 2006)

Pim Valkenberg, is a Christian theologian in the department of theology and religious studies at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, Netherlands. His research concentrates on Christian-Muslim dialogue in the context of Abrahamic partnership, both in the present and in the past. He sees the role of the Jews in successful Christian-Muslim dialogue as essential:

> My considerations on the importance of differences as an instrument for improving interreligious dialogue have been derived from my Jewish dialogue partners.

> Apart from the pervading influence of Emmanuel Lévinas and his insistence on the importance of the otherness of the religious other, pioneers in interreligious dialogue such as Jonathan Sacks and Jonathan Magonet have opened my eyes for the importance of differences… apart from the fact that the contemporary use of the term 'Abrahamic religions' has begun in the context of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Jews cannot identify with the stress on the faith of Abraham/Ibrāhīm in the same way as Muslims and Christians. (Valkenberg 2005, 11**)**

Valkenberg offers a cogent argument for including Jews in the Abrahamic-heritage dialogue:

> But if we want to remain true to this Abrahamic heritage, we cannot exclude Jewish voices from our Christian-Muslim dialogue, but should let them interrupt this dialogue, even if their voices are quite often disturbing. As Farid Esack has argued convincingly, Christian-Muslim dialogue may become a dialogue of the powers that be if it is not opened up to the broader vision that Said Nursi saw in the Bayezid Mosque. (Valkenberg 2005, 12**)**

But Said Nursi's "broader vision" involves a more complicated network of dialogical motives and presuppositions. Speaking first about the Muslims, Valkenberg claims:

> A contextual analysis shows that…Muslims may be inclined to stress common points both because their religion is so often connected with violence and other vices and because of their genetical place as youngest of the Abrahamic religions… (Valkenberg 2005, 12**)**

Referring to the Jews, Valkenberg claims:

> Jews may be inclined to stress differences because of their minority position and because they belong to the oldest Abrahamic sister-religion. (Valkenberg 2005, 12**)**

The Christians, according to Valkenberg's critique, are caught betwixt and between:

> The situation of Christians is most peculiar, because they behave differently towards their Jewish 'elder sisters,' with whom they would like to discuss common points, while Jews tend to find the differences more interesting. On the other hand, Christians always have felt the need to underscore the differences with Islam as their 'younger sister', while many Muslims rather like to discuss similarities. (Valkenberg 2005, 12**)**

Valkenberg concludes:

> For Christians in the West, this could mean that they stress common points in dialogue with Muslims and stress differences in dialogue with Jews. In this sense, Fethullah Gülen's insistence on love, altruism, compassion, forgiveness and tolerance as the pillars of dialogue may be an excellent starting point for dialogue among Muslims and Christians in the broader context of Abrahamic religions. (Valkenberg 2005, 12**)**

Disparate Dialogues

Orientations pour un dialogue entre Chretiens et Musulmans (1981), from the Vatican's Secretariat for Non Christians, identifies Muslims as "interlocutors" in the dialogue and gives brief acknowledgement of the other interlocutors—the Christian churches. This is certainly an improved way to talk! And Renard reports that he finds *Orientations* "…succeeds most admirably in focusing the reader's attention on the essential humanity and ideals of Muslims." (Renard 1992) But then, who is the reader? Renard points out that it is only realistic to assume a very limited readership since many people have no knowledge of, nor desire for Muslim-Christian dialogue:

> Closely connected with the need for Christian realism is … the evident fact that there are surely as many Muslims as there are Christians who have given no thought to, much less actively desire, dialogue. Muslim-Christian dialogue is simply not "popular" in any sense of the word. … in the final analysis, realism in dialogue requires that one acknowledge, without losing enthusiasm for dialogue, that not everyone is willing to listen. (Renard 1992)

Perhaps one reason for this apathy is that, up until recently, Christianity had no theological framework for understanding itself in the midst of a world that included other religions, even while seeing itself as the fullness of God's revelation. In contrast, Islam, from the start, "made room" for its predecessor Abrahamic religions:

> Islam's self-understanding, from its beginning in the seventh century included a critical element of pluralism that is lacking in the Christian and Jewish theologies. (Sachedina 1999, 11)

Muslims have another distinctive characteristic relating to interreligious dialogue: they are not nearly as denominationally fractured as the Christian churches. For Muslims, this means that dialogue with Christians is dialogue with a group that agrees on very little among themselves:

> …there is some justification for saying that Christianity has become a cluster of similar religions rather than a single religion. Because the notion of right beliefs has been held to be of such importance in this religion, many branches insist that they alone are the

> true Church, often claiming that salvation is to be attained not just by believing in Christ, but by following their own specific prescriptions. …attempts to unite the larger branches continue to be frustrated by inflexibility on the points of difference in theology, church polity, ecclesiastical authority, sacramental practice, and numerous other matters. (Hudson 1991, 276)

After 9-11, the World Council of Churches declares:

> Motivations for dialogue can sometimes be conditioned by power relations between religious communities and by the importance, objective and subjective, of numerical disparities. In many countries, these communities share the same language and often the same culture. Often their members are said to be granted by law equal civil and political rights. But discriminatory practices exacerbate distrust and division. The intermingling of state policies and confessional identities rooted in communal traditions may lead communities to look at each other as a threat. This is particularly true in times of uncertainty or political and constitutional changes involving a redefinition of state-religion relationships. (World Council of Churches 2002)

It seems that Christians are especially hobbled when it comes to interreligious dialogue with Muslims—their conceptual scaffolding for a religiously diverse world is still provisional and, of course, under debate among themselves. So, not surprisingly, in the midst of the flurry of new and improved attempts at philosophical and theological dialogue, there were many negative voices countering the positive ones. Indeed, even the meanings, modes, and motives for dialogue were matters of discussion, and sometimes, contention with disparate Christian groups as well as with Muslim groups. In evaluating six influential documents on Christian-Muslim dialogue, Renard notes:

> …the nature of dialogue itself is one of the predominant themes in dialogue. In addition, all six documents eventually come around to dealing with what [*Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians* (Borrmans 1981b, 34)] calls the "triple perspective of all authentic dialogue," namely, issues relating to the wonders of the universe, human dignity, and the grandeur of God. (Renard 1992)

Referring to the interest in developing dialogue, Donohue notes "It appears that the concern with dialogue is found especially in Lebanon and in the West, but the motivations in the two cases are a world apart. (Donohue 1996, 2)

Some Muslims saw attempts at interreligious dialogue as masked attempts at theological reconciliation or union. And for many Muslims, the idea of a "living faith" that evolves and is enriched over time—partially through dialogue—is suspect:

> The notion of an evolving and expanding faith is somehow alien to the Muslim mind. …evolution is often considered as betrayal and perversion of the original dogma. Herein lies, I suppose, that most serious disparity between the Christian and Muslim attitudes to questions of faith. (Renard 1992)

Complicating Muslim perceptions of Christians are the issues of Christianity's relationship with colonialism and imperialism. Also, particularly in its cultural relationship with forms of science and technology, Christianity is often and easily perceived as a threat to Islamic civilization.

> The Christian-Western influence is held responsible for secularization of culture and institutions. The intermingling of academic and religious traditions by Muslims is another aggravating factor. One often comes across an intriguing mixture of fantasy with fact, inquiry with apology. It appears that, more than the primary and fundamental differences in the dogmatic frame, the differences in historical experience and cultural development are responsible for incommunication (sic) and mistrust among Christians and Muslims. (Askari 1972)

Elaborating on how modern science's understanding of the concept of communication negatively affects understanding of interreligious dialogue, Askari notes:

> The speech of religion is being determined after the model of the speech of science. The process of secularization has already taken command paving the way for the priority of "word of man' over "Word of God." Above all, the entire theory of communication on which most of the theologians and philosophers rely is a historicist theory through and through. We are told that the first revolution in communication was brought about by scientific invention and mechanical engineering, and the heroes of this revolution were Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell. At the heels of this revolution came another, the consequence of the theory of cybernetics headed by Norbert Wiener and Dichter. It was the discovery of the unity of communication and control. All communication to the giant computers seems to take place in an imperative mood. Wiener is afraid that this process might be reversed with immense consequences for the human civilization: The process of *from man to machine* might soon become *from machine to man*. A corrective against the cybernetic threat becomes imperative. (Askari 1972)

Askari identifies the key difference between simple communication and true dialogue:

> The foundations of a third revolution have to be explored. The forces of monologue engendered by cybernetics should be countered by a dialogical revolution. Camus, Buber, Marcel, and Erich Fromm seem to be the prophets of this third revolution. The end of human communication is not to *command* but to *commune*. Dialogue should confront the forces of monologue. Alienation and anxiety are to be fought with the instruments of "love" and "intersubjectivity." (Askari 1972)

Are the new interreligious dialogues any different from former attempts?

> *Dialogue* as the term is used today to characterize encounters between persons and groups with different religions or ideologies is something quite new under the sun. In the past when different religions or ideologies met it was mainly to overcome, or at least to teach, the other, because each was completely convinced that it alone held the secret of the meaning of human life…In recent times more and more sincerely convinced persons of different religions and ideologies have slowly come to the conviction that they did not hold the secret of the meaning of human life entirely unto themselves, that in fact they had something very important to learn from each other. As a consequence they approached their encounters with other religions and ideologies not primarily in the teaching mode—holding the secret of life alone—but *primarily* in the learning mode-seeking to find more of the secret of the meaning of life. That is dialogue. (Swidler 1992)

After 9-11, the World Council of Churches attempts to explain how the "learning mode" can be effected in the context of unequal power relations among the interlocutors:

> Interreligious dialogue cannot shy away from recognizing the effects of uneven power relations and the impact of mutual perceptions, no matter how distorted they are. The relevance of dialogue initiatives depends largely on their intentional and concentrated effort to dispel fears and suspicions between those who are seen to represent religious communities. Equally, it is essential that interreligious dialogue creates an opportunity for strengthening cross-confessional loyalties, always upholding, in discussion and joint action, the centrality of the common good and inclusive political participation. (World Council of Churches 2002)

Does dialogue with Muslims require compromise in Christian beliefs? Commenting on *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Monsignor Felix Machado, under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, explains:

> *Dialogue and Proclamation* emphasizes uncompromising witness to Jesus Christ and his Gospel; however, it warns that this witness must be given in the awareness that the action of Christ and his Spirit is already mysteriously present in all who live sincerely according to their religious conviction. The Holy Father qualifies this witness as "respectful proclamation". Thanks to documents like *Dialogue and Proclamation* the

> Church is able to journey together with all believers towards the eternal contemplation of God in the splendor of his glory." (Machado 2001)

In a presentation on the meaning of interreligious dialogue—delivered during a Hindu-Christian meeting in Rome in 2003, Machado noted important conditions for successful dialogue:

> The first and most important step in interreligious dialogue is to foster and deepen friendship. When there exists "relationship" we can begin to share deeper concerns with regard to our respective religious life. Experience teaches us that when there is friendship, one begins to feel at ease in talking about common concerns and shared responsibilities. We need to meet often and regularly, not only when things are not going well for us but even more when things seem to be going very well; we need not wait for crises to arrive. It is important to inculcate a "Culture of Dialogue" in normal times. It is my conviction that people of religion, rooted firmly in their respective religious traditions, need to "stay" together; they need to spend more time in each other's company. (Machado 2004)

Taking a pragmatic approach to interreligious dialogue, the World Council of Churches observes:

> There are several expressions of dialogue, reflecting the various aspects of life itself. There is not one expression better than the other and our engagement therein should not conform to any pre-set model or hierarchy of dialogue but respond to the need, doing what is possible. In some contexts, we may discuss "cultural" differences more readily than "religious" ones, even as issues of religious concern and practice are considered in such a discussion. Similarly, co-operation about "social" concerns may be possible and even strongly supported, where there is hesitancy to consider dialogue on theological issues. (World Council of Churches 2002)

By about 2005, four forms of dialogue are distinguished by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Each form can also have different modes. Commenting on various modes of dialogue, Machado notes:

> When people of many religious traditions come together it is called a multi-religious dialogue. When people of two or three religious traditions agree to meet, these are respectively called bilateral or trilateral meetings. The bilateral meeting has its own advantages. For instance, adherents of our two religions can hope to deepen mutual ties by treating questions which are of common interest. In this kind of dialogue, partners of two different religious traditions can pay attention to their common history, points of convergence and differences, etc. The disadvantage of bilateral or trilateral dialogue is that we may get blocked by having only our two or three points of view. Although multi-lateral dialogue can tend to be superficial, it has the advantage of having views from

> several religious traditions and that at times helps to resolve certain problems. Multi-lateral dialogue is necessary also for peace in the world, because the contribution of all religions is indispensable today for harmony in our society and peace in the world. (Machado 2004)

In fact, even the word *dialogue* was problematic! Commenting on the appropriateness of continuing to use the term *dialogue*, one observer remarks:

> The word *dialogue* was not always as acceptable as it is today. When the University of St. Joseph formed an Institute for Islamo-Christian Studies, it avoided the word 'dialogue' because Muslim participants felt it was a loaded word which might create misunderstanding. (Donohue 1996, 4)

With the Greek root *logos*, perhaps the term *dialogue* has too much philosophical and theological baggage—too many negative connotations that have accreted over the years?

> In the context of interreligious dialogue pursued over many years, thanks to the interaction of study and direct experience, and linked to bonds of friendship, certain key points have become clear… I am of the opinion, for example that the term "hospitality" developed by Louis Massignon and happily adopted by Fr. Pierre de Béthune, belongs to the domain of 'categories'. As a term, it encompasses the reality of dialogue, gives it a richer and fuller context, and goes beyond the limited perspective, culturally already somewhat outdated, linked to the term 'dialogue', *dialogos.* (Standaert 2005)

Crescendos of Violence

Gamal 'Abd an-Nasir (then President of the Arab Republic of Egypt), at the laying of the cornerstone for a new Coptic-Orthodox cathedral in Cairo in 1977 said:

> The equality of opportunities is one of the first principles proclaimed by revealed religions, because by brotherhood, and equality between citizens and their opportunities, we can build the type of healthy community that religions aim at.... Over the centuries, Christians and Muslims have always been brothers.... God has never called us to fanaticism but to love... [so] no distinction is made between citizens [though] we may encounter difficulties .... We must invite the fanatics to wisdom, whether they be Muslims or Christians....This is a problem that concerns the whole nation. (Lanfry 1977)

Of course, Gamal 'Abd an-Nasir's reference to religious fanatics was merely a foreshadowing of tragic events that would soon follow. Right at the very end of the twentieth century, Ralph Braibanti, James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Duke University, observed:

"Since *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed during the pontificate of Paul VI, a tidal wave of anti-Islamic sentiment has swept the West." (Braibanti 1999). This astute observer detects the emergence of a powerful new Islamic sense of identity, predicting:

> This effervescence of a global Islamic identity represents a potential shift in economic and political power which is epochal. There is not likely to be a return to an international system in which Islamic identity is relegated to subordinate status either as an esoteric aberration or a powerless source of obscurantism. (Braibanti 1999. 11)

But, considering the events that have unfolded since the turn of the century—especially the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington by an organized group of Islamic extremists—Braibanti's cautionary prediction in 1999 was certainly understated!

It is difficult to put a date on the first signal of the modern emergence of Islamism or Islamic fundamentalism. One observer says it came into clear view about 1967 (Hamzeh 1996, 218.). But after 9-11, the emergence of Islamism and the path of violence was plain for all to see:

> The first thing that came to my mind on Tuesday, September 11th, when I first learned of the tragic events in New York and Washington, DC, was "Does God really exist?" I do not want to sound blasphemous, since I am a strong believer in the divine presence. However, if our intelligence agencies, which have huge budgets and scores of personnel at their disposal, were not able to uncover this terroristic conspiracy before it happened, how come God did not act swiftly enough to prevent or warn us against what was coming? This question is not mine alone, of course. Throughout human history, many people have asked the same question in response to tragedy and loss. Human beings naturally raise such a question when a huge calamity strikes, and human history has not been bereft of calamities. Native American Indians, enslaved Africans, Irish, Jews, and Arabs have all at some point asked the same question. Yes, all religions call for peace and justice. But let us face it, there are some 'religious people' who believe that violence is the way to sanctify their religion and uphold the moral integrity of their people. And because God is at the center of the religious quest, at least in the Abrahamic religious quest, some followers of the Abrahamic faiths believe that violence is at the heart of religion. (Abu-Rabī. 2001)

Referring to the conflict ignited in Iraq by invasion of the United States and Great Britain after 9-11, one political and cultural commentator cautions:

> Islam survived two centuries of defeats and humiliations of the Ottoman Empire and Ataturk's abolition of the caliphate. It endured generations of Western rule. It

> outlasted the pro-Western monarchs in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Ethiopia and Iran. Islam easily fended off communism, survived the rout of Nasserism in 1967 and has proven more enduring than the nationalism of Arafat or Saddam. Now, it is resisting the world's last superpower. (Buchanan 2006a)

Speaking about the fears that Al Adl wa al Ihsane, or Justice and Charity, was preparing to take up arms to fulfill the predictions of the group's mystics that the monarchy in Morocco would fall in 2006, Buchanan notes other current examples of Islamism:

> Islamists are taking over in Somalia. They are in power in Sudan. The Muslim Brotherhood won 60 percent of the races it contested in Egypt. Hezbollah swept the board in southern Lebanon. Hamas seized power from Fatah on the West Bank and Gaza. The Shia parties, which hearken to Ayatollah Sistani, brushed aside our favorites, Chalabi and Iyad Allawi, in the Iraqi elections. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is the most admired Iranian leader since Khomeini. In Afghanistan, the Taliban is staging a comeback. (Buchanan 2006a)

Buchanan asks: "What is the appeal of militant Islam?" The answer he offers is complex:

> …first, its message: As all else has failed us, why not live the faith and law God gave us? Second, it is the Muslim rage at the present condition where pro-Western regimes are seen as corruptly enriching themselves, while the poor suffer. Third, it is a vast U.S. presence that Islamic peoples are taught is designed to steal their God-given resources and assist the Israelis in humiliating them and persecuting the Palestinians. Lastly, Islamic militants are gaining credibility because they show a willingness to share the poverty of the poor and fight the Americans. (Buchanan 2006a)

Today, unlike the violence of Islam's early expansion and the reactionary Crusades, crescendos of violence erupt within a new context: a riven world of post-modern Christians and pre-modern Muslims:

> At this dawn of a new millennium, a growing number of thinkers claim that we no longer live in an age of rapid and radical changes. Rather, so they say, we are now living through a rapid and radical change of ages. Economists, for example, speak of the historic shift from industrial to 'postindustrial' society. Experts in social communication prefer to label it as a transition from literate to 'post-literate' culture. Finally, artists and social scientists prefer to describe it as a countercultural movement from modern to 'postmodern' ethos. If these claims are true, then perhaps the Catholic Church needs to convene a Third Vatican Council to discern anew the 'signs of the times' (Estepa 2005)

The Critical Need for Improved Dialogue

The crescendos of violence continue as the current fugue of war and rumors of war continues to play. Thirty years before 9-11, there had already been urgent Christian and Muslim voices calling for interreligious and other forms of dialogue.

> From mechanics to cybernetics the forces of monologue become clearer, stronger, wider. The twentieth century is considered to be the point at which man is most threatened, lonely, driven to despair and insanity. It is to this challenge that the forces of dialogue should respond. Interreligious dialogue is therefore urgent and imperative. (Askari 1972)

Meditating on the events of 9-11, Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Wales, cautions about the tendency to reduce complex relationships to polarized opposites, and he highlights the call for a global effort for dialogue:

> The Concilium declaration sees 'a clear trend in interpretation to categorize entire groups, even peoples and cultures, into Good and Evil. To do this justifies a mechanism for blind revenge…. The categorical separation of the world into Good and Evil is a dangerous temptation and completely unacceptable, no matter from which side this division is undertaken.' …Instead of short-sighted campaigns, the declaration calls for 'a new truly global movement which will join... continents and cultures to one another in the will for justice and in mutual respect.' This offers the 'only real chance' of overcoming terrorism and fostering a lasting security. (McVey 2002)

Now, the voices calling for dialogue to abet and replace the continuing cycle of violence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, and in other areas have become even more clear, insistent, and urgent. Hans Küng puts the import of interreligious dialogue succinctly: "…no world peace is possible without religious peace and we cannot have religious peace without dialogue between the religions." (Schildgen 2002) Although some improvements in interreligious dialogue were apparent at the very beginning of the 21st century, there were also signals that there were urgent challenges looming.

> The last few decades have seen some concerted efforts towards a new understanding in scholarship and dialogue. But, current developments, political and otherwise, may be threatening to build up new attitudes of distrust and hostility. This

> imposes a new urgency in our consideration of Christian-Muslim relations and of our priority in dialogue and cooperation. Our response should build on much of what we have learned in the last decades. The sense of urgency should not divert us from the long-term necessity of continuing to deepen our mutual understanding and trust. (World Council of Churches 1999)

In Arinze's view, mere demographics pose the fundamental challenge for how Islam and Christianity will evolve their relationship:

> Christians form about 33% of the total world population. Muslims number around 18%. That means that Christians and Muslims are more than half of humanity. Moreover, theirs are the two religions most widespread geographically. It matters very much, not only to Islam and Christianity, but also to the world, how the followers of these two religions relate to one another and how they envisage these relationships at this turning point in history when the 21st century is almost at the door." (Arinze 1998, 1)

There are many other voices of urgency and warnings of over-reaction. For example, Archbishop Williams of Canturbury says "There is no doubt that the present violence throws a deep shadow over conversations between the West and the Muslim world." (Williams 2004)

At the end of Ramadan. (10-14-2005), Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, then president of the PCID, wrote to Muslims:

> Dear Friends, As "*Id al-Fitr*" comes round again, at the close of the month of Ramadan, I wish to offer to all of you, in whatever part of the world you may be, my very best wishes for a Happy Feast. (Fitzgerald 2005)

But quickly departing from felicitudes, Fitzgerald sounds an urgent tone by recalling what Pope Benedict XVI had stressed to the representatives of other religions who attended the celebration at the beginning of his Pontificate:

> Then, making reference to the conflicts, violence and wars present in our world, the Pope emphasized that it is the duty of every one, especially those who profess to belong to a religious tradition, to work for peace, and that "our efforts to come together and foster dialogue are a valuable contribution to building peace on solid foundations. …Pope Benedict XVI concluded by saying: "It is therefore imperative to engage in sincere and authentic dialogue, built on respect for the dignity of every human person, created, as we Christians firmly believe, in the image and likeness of God" (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). (Fitzgerald 2005)

On the Muslim side, there are also voices of urgency. A good example is Anwar Ibrahim's urgent call to dialogue—civilizational and otherwise—that he made in 1994 at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. (Ibrahim 1995. passim) More recently, as the conflict in Iraq continued to rage, the 2005 episode of the offensive Danish cartoons led some Muslims to see an example of media aggression from the Christian West:

> The events in Denmark concerning the Messenger of God represent an entirely unacceptable crime of aggression that has violated the highest sanctities of the Muslim people. Moreover it is devastating to the ideal of convivial dialogue between peoples, as enjoined in the Quranic verse, which reads, 'And We created you as nations and tribes that you might know one another'. (al-Suweidan 2006)

Some Muslims also recognize that the world is at a critical juncture: either the voice of reason will prevail or the voice of violence will prevail. For example, Gihan Shahine, reporting on an initiative by Islamic preacher Amr Khaled for an inter-faith conference in Denmark after the Cartoon incident writes:

> There was consensus among at least 170 Islamic scholars attending a recent conference in Qatar that while public furor was only a normal reaction to the cartoons, it was high time for more dialogue with the West. Educating the West about Islam is what scholars around the world are promoting for the time being while many other civil societies are pressing for a UN legislation banning insulting religions and sanctuaries. Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moller, welcomed the initiatives as "a positive message" saying he was pleased Khaled would be able to "practice such dialogue in Copenhagen in the near future." Without predicting the results of the Copenhagen dialogue, Khaled warned, "Unless the voice of reason becomes louder, the voice of clash mongers will prevail." (Shahine 2006)

As a voice of reason, Hans Küng, an eminent Catholic theologian, notes the inescapable linkage between the pursuit of interreligious dialogue and the development of a "theology of religions."

> My thesis, therefore, is: No world peace without peace among religions, no peace among religions without dialogue between the religions, and no dialogue between the religions without accurate knowledge of one another. This is one reason why we are assembled here. We can no longer regard the world religions simply as existing side by

> side; rather we must view them together-in interdependence and in interaction. Today, no religion can live in splendid isolation. (Küng 1987, 161)

Küng is clear about his definition of interreligious dialogue—no longer just the purview of theologians or political strategists—now a matter of urgent importance for everyone:

> I am well aware of the fact that there will always be persons (in certain religions more than in others) who will ask, "Why should we talk to each other?" I asked a European specialist of the Arab world why should we talk to each other, and what, in his opinion, the solution is for Jerusalem. He was quite candid when he said, "War." I believe that this is the alternative to religious dialogue: war. I told him that we had already had a number of wars—without resolving anything. I am convinced that interreligious dialogue is of the greatest importance not just for politicians concerned with conflicts in the Near East, but for all human beings involved in the ordinary business of life. (Küng 1987, 161)

In the "ordinary business of life," most people will easily understand interreligious dialogue in terms of respect for their personal religious rights or freedoms. So here we come to the heart of one of the central problems in the current Christian-Muslim efforts at dialogue: "What does religious freedom mean in today's world?" In 2006, Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the American episcopate's Committee on International Policy, testified before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations in a hearing devoted to the 2005 Human Rights Report of the U.S. Department of State. First, he reiterated the Catholic Church's position on dialogue:

> Constructive and respectful dialogue with Islam is imperative in today's world…Rather than deploring a clash of cultures, we need to foster cultures of dialogue and respect as keys to justice and peace. (Wenski 2006)

At the request of the subcommittee, Bishop Thomas Wenski specifically addressed the issue of religious freedom and the status of Christians in a number of Islamic countries.

> The violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and several conflicts in Africa come close to being perceived, in overly simplistic terms, as just conflicts of East versus West, of all of Islam versus all of Christianity…Like Christianity, Islam is a religion with different expressions…Tensions among these expressions of Islam have been exacerbated by the rise of militant Islam and the misuse

> and perversion of faith to justify violence….Serious conflicts and religious tensions do exist between Christians and Muslims in some Islamic countries and the denial of religious liberty in these situations is a painful reality. (Wenski 2006)

Bishop Wenski offered five recommendations for U.S. policies to improve religious freedom in countries with Muslim majorities (see Table 6).

Table 6. Policies to Support Religious Freedom in Some Islamic Countries
Thomas Wenski

1. The U.S. government needs to *make religious liberty even more central* to its foreign policy in both policy and practice.
2. We urge the U.S. government more intensively and directly to *engage religious communities and religious leaders*
3. We recommend greater participation in and support for genuine *interfaith dialogue*. Dialogue is not easy in times and situations of conflict. But our experience suggests the necessity of encouraging honest dialogue that is candid and respectful.
4. We recommend promotion of concrete *reciprocity* in policies and practices of law that relate to religious freedom. At the heart of the Holy See's current efforts there is a call for mutual respect and reciprocity.
5. The U.S. must *address the social, economic, political and military factors* that make it easier for opponents of religious freedom to incite religious intolerance.

Elaborating on the theme of reciprocity in the implementation of religious freedom policies—a theme that came to the fore at about the time of Benedict XVI's election as pope—Wenski offers an operational definition of this key dialogic concept:

> Reciprocity means, for example, that the Catholic Church expects support for efforts to permit the construction of Christian churches, schools and other religious institutions in Islamic countries, and expects countries with Christian majorities to allow the same for their Muslim minorities. Our nation, with its long tradition of religious freedom should encourage reciprocity in the treatment of religious minorities in countries with Muslim majorities. (Wenski 2006)

Wenski also identifies some other important causes for religious intolerance in certain countries:

> Although nothing justifies religious discrimination and persecution, social inequities, intense secularization, some abuses in the struggle with terrorism, the use of religious language to justify violence, and military occupations provide fuel for the fires of religious extremism and intolerance. (Wenski 2006)

The current context for Christian-Muslim dialogue is complicated. On the one hand, significant progress has been made in the renewal and increase of intellectual discourse between these two groups. Now. theological discourses exhibit clear expressions of the importance of moving beyond apologetics and disputation to an authentic listening and learning mode of dialogue. In this regard, Pope John Paul II's 2001 visit to Syria, when he became the first pope to set foot in a mosque, is emblematic of the new attempts at ending centuries of suspicion and hostility. On the other hand, intellectual dialogue at all levels—theological and otherwise—has been sidelined and even crippled by "dialogues" of horrendous violence and human suffering. The recent and continuing abuses of Islamicist terrorists, as well as the abuses in the struggle with terrorism, have relegated efforts at respectful dialogue to back-page news and very little "share of mind" for the average Christian and Muslim.

Complicating matters further, there seems to be a growing tendency on each side of the dialogic divide to perceive slights and offenses when the common assumption among trusted dialogue partners should be that none were intended. A case in point is the *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections* lecture that Pope Benedict XVI gave recently at University of Regensburg in Germany. (Benedict XVI 2006d) In his speech, the Pope explored the historical and philosophical differences between Islam and Christianity and discussed the relationship between violence and faith—questioning the concept of "holy war." Quoting from the Byzantine Emperor Manual II Paleologos (the 14th century Orthodox Christian empire had its capital in what is now the Turkish city of Istanbul), the Pope stressed that they were not his own words. Benedict quoted the emperor:

> Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached. (BBC News 2006a)

Benedict said "I quote" twice to stress that the words were not his own. The apparent purpose of the quote was to bolster his argument that violence was "incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul." (BBC News 2006a) But considering that the Pope was scheduled to visit Turkey toward the end of 2006, it is only reasonable to assume that this quote was selected purposely—with the Turkish audience very much in mind.

> …the Turkish response was swift and strong… Religious leader Ali Badda Kolu said the Pope's comments represented what he called an "abhorrent, hostile and prejudiced point of view". Whilst Muslims might express their criticism of Islam and of Christianity, he argued, they would never defame the Holy Bible or Jesus Christ. He said he hoped the Pope's speech did not reflect "hatred in his heart" against Islam. Many Turks see Benedict as a Turkophobe and commentators call his words just before the holy month of Ramadan "ill-timed and ill-conceived", our correspondent adds. (BBC News 2006a)

In a less than forthright response that failed to note that the term *jihad* does not have a simple and univocal meaning in Islamic theology, a senior Pakistani Islamic scholar, Javed Ahmed Gamdi, said *jihad* was not about spreading Islam with the sword. In response to the rising furor, the Vatican issued a statement that the Pope had wanted to make clear that he rejected violence motivated by religion; he had not intended to offend Muslims.

> "It certainly wasn't the intention of the Pope to carry out a deep examination of *jihad* (holy war) and of Muslim thought on it, much less to offend the sensibility of Muslim believers," said chief Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi in a statement. "It is clear that the Holy Father's intention is to cultivate a position of respect and dialogue towards other religions and cultures, and that clearly includes Islam." (BBC News 2006b)

Unfortunately, this clarification failed to avoid more negative results (BBC News 2006b):

- Pakistan summoned the Vatican's ambassador to express regret over the remarks, as parliament passed a resolution condemning the comments
- The head of the Muslim Brotherhood said the remarks "aroused the anger of the whole Islamic world"
- Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya condemned the Pope's comments
- In Iraq, the comments were criticised at Friday prayers by followers of radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr
- The "hostile" remarks drew a demand for an apology from a top religious official in Turkey
- The 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference said it regretted the Pope's remarks

Then, the Pope issued an apology, not for what he had said, but for the negative reactions it had provoked:

> I am deeply sorry for the reactions in some countries to a few passages of my address at the University of Regensburg, which were considered offensive to the sensibility of Muslims. These in fact were a quotation from a medieval text, which do not in any way express my personal thought. I hope this serves to appease hearts and to clarify the true meaning of my address, which in its totality was and is an invitation to frank and sincere dialogue, with mutual respect. (BBC News 2006c)

Still, the uproar from Muslim quarters continued. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the Pope's remarks on Islam were in line with what he called a "crusade" against Muslims. He said the remarks were the "latest link" in "the chain of a conspiracy to set in train a crusade". Another influential voice of protest was Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a Qatari Muslim scholar who called for a day of anger. Sami Abu Zuhri, a spokesman for Hamas, which controlled the Palestinian parliament, said: "We do not view the statement attributed to the Pope as an apology." (BBC News 2006c) In subsequent, clarifying statements, the Pope said

> After the reactions of the first moment, my words at the University of Regensburg will represent an impulse and encouragement to a positive dialogue, including self-critical, both among religions, as well as between modern reason and Christians' faith. (Zenit 2006k)

From the Christian West's viewpoint, there was bewilderment about how and why the Pope's remarks at Regensburg were misconstrued. From the Muslim perspective, there was also bewilderment. How could the Pope be calling for a self critical dialogue in view of his failure to place his remarks about the incompatibility of violence and religious faith in the context of both past Christian and Muslim behavior?

On balance, in view of episodes like Benedict's Regensburg lecture, there is no good evidence that effective, authentic Christian-Muslim dialogue has been achieved yet. Indeed, this and other recent examples of non-self-critical dialogue indicate that mutual distrust and suspicion

continue. This brief, eclectic survey of recent Christian-Muslim dialogue does not do justice to the severity of the current situation in which a renewal of effective dialogue—including interreligious dialogue—is completely essential for creating peace. But before considering the conditions and prospects for more effective dialogue today, we turn next to a brief summary and assessment of the major current dialogical hindrances or improvement opportunities.

2. MAJOR IMPEDIMENTS IN CHRISTIAN – MUSLIM DIALOGUE

Fundamental, Unresolved Theological Issues

The historical record of misunderstandings, suspicions, and aggressions between Christians and Muslims is extensive. Disregarding cultural, social, political, economic, and other existential dimensions of their dialogues, the root of the divide between these two groups is the fact that they have very divergent viewpoints about the nature of human beings and their relation to God. Hence, the roots of their disagreements are twined—intellectually and emotionally—within their conflicting belief systems. Their philosophical/theological frameworks are only partially compatible on the conceptual level. Of course, these conceptual hindrances can be marginalized by pursuing merely pragmatic dialogue about matters of common concern. But, fundamental conceptual/linguistic/ problems cannot be ignored or dismissed as irrelevant—they often reappear from the marginal mists of our discourses and feed ignorance, suspicion, stereotyping, disrespect, intolerance, fear, and violence.

First, then, let's review some of the major theological disconnects. As our point of departure, we will adopt the perspective of an accomplished and highly-regarded Muslim scholar, Seyyed Nasr. Table 7 displays his list of philosophical/theological obstacles (Nasr 1998, *passim*).

Table 7. Problems/Obstacles to be Overcome
in Christian-Muslim Dialogue
Seyyed Nasr

1. Divine Revelation (*Wahy*) has divergent meanings and import.
2. The status of Muhammad as a prophet must be resolved.
3. The status of the *Qur'an* must be resolved.

Table 7 continued.

4. The Incarnation and Trinity are doctrines that oppose Islam's understanding of the unity of the Divine Principle.
5. Salvation (*Falaah*) doctrines pose serious problems.
6. The distinction between Divine Law (*Shari'ah*), and secular law is clear in Christianity—but very differently perceived in Islam.
7. The destiny of Jerusalem is problematic.
8. Evangelization (*Da'wah)* activities are problematic.

Divine Revelation (*Wahy*)

The concept of Divine Revelation (*Wahy*) has divergent meanings and import for Christians and Muslims. Muslims consider the Old and New Testaments as authentic but incomplete revelation. In contrast, Christians consider formal revelation closed at the end of the New Testament, so Quranic revelation is dismissed or discounted.

> Granted that it is easier for Islam to accept Christianity as an authentic message from Heaven than vice-versa…Christians have a higher hurdle to surmount than do Muslims…most of the influential Christian theologians, even among Catholics and Protestants wishing to carry out serious religious dialogue with Muslims, find it difficult to go beyond the literal meaning of "I am the way, the life, and the truth" and *extra eccelesiam nulla salus*. (Nasr 1998, 3)

Stature of Muhammad as Prophet

Closely related to the concept of revelation is the question of the status of Muhammad as a prophet. One Christian observer asserts that this issue is the most vexing to Muslims:

> There is an issue that disturbs the Muslims more than any other in their approach to Christians: it is the silence and reserve of Christians regarding Mohammed. He is, for Muslims, of course, the last and the greatest of the Prophets. Our reticence on this subject surprises and scandalizes them. They do not understand why we refuse to grant Mohammed the respect they themselves grant to the person of Jesus. (Lanfry 1977)

Hans Küng, a major Catholic theologian, offers important insights on the the status of Muhammad:

> Christians need to take Muhammad more seriously in order that the one, true, incomparable God might always occupy the center of their faith. I think my friend John Cobb would agree that Christocentrism without theocentrism is valueless, for Jesus is the Word and, as Cobb has stressed, the Wisdom of God. Christians also need to hear Muhammad's warning against the dangerous idolatry of listening to other gods, as well as his admonition that faith and life, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, belong together, even in politics. Thus, Muhammad could provide for us Christians, not the decisive, guiding norm that Jesus gives us, but a *prophetic corrective* in the name of the one and same God: "I am nothing but a distinctive warner" (sura 46:9).
>
> The questions and issues we have looked at can present difficult challenges for everyone involved: Eastern Christians, Western Christians, Hellenistic Christians, Judeo-Christians, and of course for our Muslim brothers and sisters. The observation of a Pakistani friend of mine, a Muslim scholar, Riffat Hassan, is appropriate:
>
> > Every religion has its problematic point, a crucial point that seems to be indisputable, not negotiable, and which is the main difficulty for the others. For Christians, this point is christology, that Jesus is the Son of God. For Jews, it is the promise that Israel, with its land, is the People of God. For Muslims, it is the *Qur'an* as the Word of God—Son of God, People of God, Word of God.
>
> I think, as she does, that we should discuss these issues with reverence, with great esteem for all those who hold one of them as their professed faith, knowing that this matter is very delicate. ...But I come back to my beginning: we stand before the alternatives of war and peace. I am certain we can have peace among nations only if there is peace among the religions, and especially among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And that will happen only if we are able to speak together as brothers and sisters. (Küng 1987, 161)

Status of the *Qur'an*

As Küng notes about the stature of Muhammad as a prophet: "This leads us to an even more difficult question. If be is the prophet, what, then, about the *Qur'an*?" (Küng 1987, 161) He continues:

> Here we can turn to Wilfred Cantwell Smith who was one of the first to focus this question concerning the authorship of the *Qur'an*. For centuries this question was never posed as a serious issue. It would have threatened with excommunication Muslims as well as Christians—the former if they had doubted it, the latter if they had affirmed it. And who can deny that this question has caused deep political divisions among the peoples of the world, from the first Islamic conquests in the seventh century to the Crusades and the capture of Constantinople, to the siege of Vienna in modem times and the Iranian revolution under Khomeini. …This negation was later restated by secular Western scholars of comparative religion who took it for granted that the *Qur'an* was not at all the word of God, but wholly that of Muhammad. (Küng 1987, 161)

Küng does not question whether the *Qur'an* is the word of God, but he does question the ways in which this word can be understood:

> That the *Qur'an* is the word of God I do not contest. However, there is the further question: *How* is the Qur'an (or the Bible) the word of God? Does revelation directly fall from heaven, so to speak? Is it, as some maintain, dictated word for word by God? Is there nothing human in this word of God? It must be remembered that not only Muslims believe this; fundamentalist Christians look upon the Bible in the same way. The fundamentalist Christian says: All this is dictated by God, from the first phrase to the last. There is nothing that changes, nothing to interpret. Everything is clear. (Küng 1987, 161)

As with the Christian Bible, the *Qur'an* is the nexus for the classic debate between reason and faith, between critical exegesis and literalism, between theological liberals and fundamentalists. For a Muslim theologian like Ibn Taymiyya, a thirteenth-century Arab whose ideas are still influential today in the Salafi or Wahhabi traditions, the *Qur'an* supersedes the human intellect (*'aql*). Reason is subordinate and subservient to revelation—a text beyond rational deconstruction. For *Qur'anic* literalists like Ibn Taymiyya, the only proper use of *'aql* is for understanding Islam as demonstrated by the Prophet and his companions, and for defending Islam against heresies.

> When discussing the nature of God, he argued, one must accept the descriptions found in the *Qur'an* and *sunna* and apply the orthodox view of not asking how (*bi-la kayf*) particular attributes exist in God. This means that one believes in all of the attributes of God mentioned in the *Qur'an* and *sunna* without investigating the nature of these, because the human mind is incapable of understanding the eternal God. For example, one accepts that God is mounted upon a throne above the heavens without questioning how this is possible. This same attitude is held for all of God's attributes such as his sight, his hearing or his hand. (Pavlin 1998)

Beyond the questions of scriptural authorship, exegesis, or epistemology, it is also important to note the difficulty of making a direct comparison between the Bible and the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* is not simply Islam's holy scripture—the Muslim equivalent of the Bible—it is also sacramental. Just as the noted Dominican theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx could write a book titled "Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God," we can imagine a Muslim theologian

adapting a Christian theological framework by writing a book titled "The *Qur'an,* the Sacrament of the Encounter with Allah." Writing within a Benedictine monastic tradition, Abbot Timothy Wright and Brother Wulstan Peterburs observe:

> The Koran in its original form, Arabic, is interpreted as the Words of God dictated to the Prophet. This is the authentic and authoritative version. It could be described, to use our terms, as the sacrament of the presence of God—a value that does not extend to translations. Many learn the whole of it by heart, even at six years of age. Down the centuries many scholars and mystics have tried to apply, interpret and argue about it. There are important differences from our attitude to the Bible. …It soon becomes apparent that the absence of any sense of sacrament is the crucial difference between Christianity and Islam. (Wright and Peterburs 2002)

Incarnation, Trinity, and the Unity of the Divine Principle

Concerning the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, the *Qur'an* admonishes Christians:

> People of the Book, do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about Allah. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was no more than Allah's apostle and his Word, which he cast into Mary: a spirit from him. So believe in Allah and his apostles and do not say [of Allah, that he is] "three." Allah is but one God. Allah forbid that He should have a son! (sura 4:171)

Christians have a unique belief about God's presence based on an historical human being, Jesus. They believe that Jesus is the Word of the Father made flesh and the one who sent the Holy Spirit after his departure from Earth. Pope John Paul II considered the Incarnation of God in the man Jesus as the most basic theological difference between Christians and Muslims:

> Pope John Paul II therefore continued his…speech in Morocco in this way: 'Loyalty demands also that we should recognize and respect our differences. Obviously, the most fundamental difference is the view that we hold on the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. You know that, for the Christians, this Jesus causes them to enter into all intimate knowledge of the mystery of God and into a filial communion by his gifts, so that they recognize him and proclaim him Lord and Savior. Those are important differences, which we can accept with humility and respect, in mutual tolerance. There is a mystery on which, I am certain, God will one day enlighten us.' (Bonny 2001)

Christian theologians like John Hick and Hans Küng have proposed interpretations of the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity that seek to emphasize the unity of the Divine Principle, but these are not mainstream interpretations. Küng clearly dismisses the notion that the conceptual subtleties of the doctrine of the Trinity have somehow eluded Muslim theologians:

> Furthermore, there is no truth in the assertion of Christian apologists and many scholars of religion that Muslim theologians have always misinterpreted the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (three in one) as a doctrine of tritheism (three gods). There is a certain misunderstanding of the Trinity in the *Qur'an*, I believe, but that is not so important. As early as the medieval controversies there were many Muslim theologians who understood the Christian doctrine quite well. (Küng 1987, 161)

Salvation (*falaah*) Doctrines

If, as the Bible says, "God wills the salvation of all human beings" (1 Timothy 2:4), what about the many billions of human beings who do not confess that Jesus is Lord? During the Crusades, it was confess or die. During the Inquisition, it was confess or burn. Similar examples of extreme intolerance of the "infidels" can be seen as well on the Muslim side—most notably today in the activities of radical Islamic groups. As Küng notes, the question of salvation cuts to the quick of interreligious dialogue:

> Can there be salvation outside the Christian churches, outside Christianity? This is a question of great urgency today, because if we think Muslims are going to hell anyway, it is not really worthwhile to engage in a dialogue with them. (Küng 1987, 161)

Both Christians and Muslims agree on doctrines like the immortality of the human soul and the reality of distinct *post mortem* states (heaven, hell, and purgatory). Yet, their traditional salvation doctrines are incompatible (Nasr 1998, 5)—the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* notwithstanding. Before that declaration, the exclusivist model for salvation (*extra eccelesiam nulla salus*) dominated in both Catholic and Protestant theology.

> The traditional Catholic position, as forged in the first centuries of the Christian church by Origen, Cyprian, and Augustine, is generally well known: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. No salvation outside the church. Thus for the future as well: *extra ecclesiam*

nullus propheta. No prophet outside the church. The Ecumenical Council of Florence in 1442 defined this very clearly:

> The Holy Church of Rome ... believes firmly, confesses and proclaims, that no one outside the Catholic Church, neither heathen nor Jew nor unbeliever, nor one who is separated from the Church, will share in eternal life, but will perish in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, if this person fails to join it [the Catholic Church] before death.

(Küng 1987, 161)

Today, this exclusivist model for understanding the place of other religions vis-à-vis one's own is the dominant model for conservative and fundamentalist Christians and for most Muslims.

Divine Law (*Shari'ah*)

The distinction between Divine (sacred) law and secular law is clear in Christianity—but very differently perceived in Islam. As one observer notes, "Islam's approach to establishing and maintaining an ethical public order does not produce clearly distinct boundaries between private religious practice and public behavior." (Sachedina 1999, 5) For example, during a 2002 visit to Qom, Iran, Abbot Timothy Wright and Brother Wulstan Peterburs gathered these impressions:

> Iran is a religious country, a derogatory description for those attuned to secular countries. For the monk it was not such a confining experience. In a religious country God is not hidden. God's presence is acclaimed, God's Word decorates billboards, and the splendid religious architecture invites to worship. What one sees are not long queues of tourists coming to gape at culture, but streams of pilgrims coming to say their prayers, especially on Fridays. During the day work stops for prayer five times a day – something that is very encouraging for visiting monks. Prayer, public and private, is as normal in a religious society as having meals or buying and selling in the bazaar. … We did not feel in the least out of place wearing our monastic habit in the streets; it caused fewer heads to turn than walking down Victoria Street in London. Courtesy is valued: greetings are offered, along with slight bows and the hand on the heart. …I contrasted the ubiquitous charity boxes, providing the opportunity for all to honour their commitment to give, with our charity boxes, so often a target for vandals. (Wright and Peterburs 2002)

Christians have tended to characterize "God's laws" as moral and spiritual laws; whereas secular or civil laws govern people's daily affairs. From the Muslim perspective, the separation of secular law from Divine law has led to perverse secularism and hedonism, especially in the

West. (Nasr 1998, 7) In Islam, Divine Law is based on the *Qur'an* and *Hadith.* This Divine Law is the source of all secular law. Hence, these two "forms" of law are not really distinct for Muslims. Nevertheless, there is urgent debate among Muslim theologians about the nature of *Shari'ah* and its relationship to the *Qur'an* and *sunna*:

> Despite the apparent growing demand for Islamization—the total application of Islamic law to every aspect of public as well as private life-in many Muslim countries, and perhaps because of that, there is also growing awareness of the crisis in Islamic law reform… It is true that Muslims believe that Islam, as contained in its fundamental sources, namely the *Qur'an* and *sunna* traditions of the Prophet, is perfect and infallible. It does not follow from this belief, I submit, that the *shari'ah*, which is in fact no more than the interpretation and application of those fundamental sources by the early Muslims, is also perfect and infallible. This basic distinction between Islam and historical *shari'ah* is vital to the success of the process of modern Islamization. If historical *shari'ah* is to be held as sacred and permanent as Islam itself, Muslims cannot change those principles of *shari'ah* that are no longer valid and viable. (An-Na'im 1988)

Although the Muslim concept of *shari'a* appears to be a parochial issue within Islam, it is a hindrance to Christian-Muslim dialogue on a number of issues, including the reciprocal extension of religious freedoms to Christians in Muslim-dominated countries. The histories of religious and secular law in the Christian West and in Muslim lands seem to confirm the conflict between Christian and Muslim conceptions of law.

> It was not until the Western nations broke away from their religious law that they became more tolerant; and it was only when the Muslims fell away from their religious law that they declined in tolerance and other evidences of the highest culture. (Hameed 2006)

Destiny of Jerusalem

Eschatology is an area where Christians and Muslims have more agreement than any other two religions. But it has also become a theological bone of contention between certain Christian and Muslim groups. Both Christians and Muslims believe that Jerusalem is the chosen city for certain final events that precede the end of the world. But in the Muslim perspective, Christian Zionists and other fundamentalist Christian groups that support the Jewish domination

of Jerusalem have adopted a virulent anti-Islamic attitude—especially regarding the destiny of Jerusalem. (Nasr 1998, 9) Although the status of Israel and its control of Jerusalem are modern political obstacles, we can see this same obsession with Jerusalem's destiny in the arguments for undertaking the early Crusades.

Evangelization (*Da'wah)*

Both Islam and Christianity share a strong missionary character. Both groups perceive themselves as bearers of the final good news from God. And both anathematize any believer who decides to "switch sides." Here is where the theological rubber meets the road. For example:

> Spain brought Christianity to the Philippines in 1521, three decades after having militarily ejected Islam from Granada in 1492, where it had been present since the reign of Abdurahman II in 721. Thus, when the Spaniards came to the Philippines, they brought a "fanatical hatred of Islam which was born of hundred years of struggling for independence from Moorish rule." Islam had been rapidly spreading throughout the Philippines for almost three centuries when the Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century to colonize and convert the natives to Christianity. …In 1570, Spain succeeded in destroying the Manila settlement ruled by Rajah Sulayman, a native of Jolo and a relative of the sultan of Brunei. The Spaniards came to convert, but the resident Muslims of the Philippines resisted this religious intolerance. For 300 years the Spanish and the Tausug were engaged in almost continuous warfare, which ended only when Spain left the Philippines in 1899. The gradual Islamization of Jolo was played out against this background of constant struggle. Consequently, the Tausug's conception of Islam grew naturally to emphasize the idea of *parrang sabil* or *jihad* against the non-believers. (Oliveros 2002)

John Renard says that evangelization may be the most problematic theological issue facing Christians and Muslims. Commenting on the document *Christian-Muslim Relations. An Introduction for Christians in the United States of America* from the National Council of Christian Churches, U.S.A., Renard notes the relationship of this issue with salvation doctrines:

> …Islam's apparent flexibility toward Christianity is, however, more theoretical than practiced, (Islam considers Christianity a divinely revealed religion, whereas the converse is not the case.) In practice, both traditions are highly exclusivist. (Renard 1992)

Renard observes that the evangelization imbroglio is perceived by Muslims as entwined with Western colonialism and imperialism:

> Much hard feeling remains among both traditions as a result of past practice of mission and *da'wah*; debate over what positions ought to be adopted in the present is quite heated; and there is strong consensus that this topic cannot be sidestepped in the future. … At least from the Muslim point of view, negative effects of the "arrival of the Christian missionaries in the company of European colonizers" are still very much in evidence. (Renard 1992)

Commenting on a 1976 report on the *Consultation of Christians and Muslims Concerning Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah*, Renard notes four important points made by the Muslim co-editor:

> First, Islam was misrepresented and portrayed in such a way as to discredit it and its adherents. Second, Christian missionaries often took advantage of the sick, the poor, and the immature by offering education, financial help, and medical treatment, often acting "as an organic part of colonialism and cultural imperialism." Third, Islam was often subverted in favor of "nationalism, secularism, modernism, socialism, even communism." Fourth, Christians have often considered Muslims political rivals, and the former sometimes appear more zealous for the de-Islamization of the Islamic world than they are troubled by the de-Christianization of the Christian world. Ibis Muslim's Christian counterpart presented neither a rebuttal nor a similar critique of Islam. The Consultation's joint "official" statement acknowledges that there may in some instances be good reason for continued Muslim suspicion of Christian intentions." (Renard 1992)

From the sardonic perspective of Isma'il Al Faruqi, modern Christian evangelization among Muslims is not only intrusive, it also distorts the authentic religion of Jesus and then attempts to purvey this distortion to people who are already know the ethic of Jesus:

> Perhaps nothing is more anachronistic—indeed absurd—than the spectacle of the Western Christian missionary preaching to Muslims the Western figurization of the religion of Jesus. The absurdity is twofold: First, the West, whence the missionary comes and which sustains him in his effort, has for decades stopped finding meaning in that figurization which is the content of mission. Indeed, in the missionary himself, that figurization determines but one little portion of his consciousness, the remainder falling under the same corroding secularism, materialism and skeptical empiricism so common in Western thought and culture. Second, the missionary preaches this figurization to Muslims who, in North Africa and the Near East, were thrice Christians. … The comedy in evidence today is that the missionary is utterly unaware of this long experience of the Muslim with Jesus Christ. (Al Faruqi 1968)

In a more constructive tone, Aram I, Catholicos of the Armeniam Apostolic Church of Cilicia notes the need for reciprocity on both sides of the evangelization issue:

> … in order to pave the future course of Christian-Muslim dialogue, we must analyze the concepts of *Dhimma*, co-citizenship and human rights and majority-minority relations. These are not simply academic issues; they are existential problems that deeply affect the co-existence of our communities. Hence, where Christians are a minority, there is a need to move beyond a *Dhimmi* mentality and to develop a system based on equal rights. Where Muslims are in a minority situation, broader spaces of creative interaction and wider possibilities of active participation in public life must be provided. Unless these issues are addressed seriously, Muslim-Christian community relations will continue to be characterized by feelings of inferiority, submission and intolerance. The fundamental question is: what does it mean to be co-citizens in a society in which Christians and Muslims live together?" (Aram I 2002)

A Christian View of Dialogical Obstacles

Our point of departure in considering the major philosophical/theological impediments to Christian-Muslim dialogue, was the set of issues identified by Seyyed Nasr. And, indeed, every Christian theologian will agree that this is at least a core set of doctrinal conflicts. But other theologically-related obstacles have also been identified. In this regard, Cardinal Francis Arinze (Arinze 1998, *passim*), notes several others that must be addressed (see Table 8).

Table 8. Obstacles and Challenges
in Christian-Muslim Dialogue
Cardinal Francis Arinze

1. The weight of the past is considerable—somehow we must all forgive and forget the many past quarrels and hostilities.
2. Lack of self-criticism on the part of Muslims impedes constructive and lasting relationships—is there an Islamic penitential theology?
3. Manipulation of religion by politics—interventions by governments or political parties that encourage sectarian or extremist religious groups.
4. Religious fanaticism or extremism often leads to violence, the denial of the right to religious freedom.
5. Conflicting approaches to human rights and freedom of worship are confounded by two divergent views of human nature.
6. Reciprocity in extending the right of freedom to worship is problematic in some Islamic countries.

So, not only do Christians and Muslims have distinctly different ideas about God, they also have divergent ideas about what it means to be human and whether religious freedom is an inalienable right. As Arinze notes:

> …some predominantly Muslim countries have their reservations regarding the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which they see as an expression of Western culture. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, proclaimed in Paris, in 1981, does contain an article on the right to religious freedom (art. 13). It is however, very short… the content of the article remains vague. It is not clear whether or not people of religions other than Islam have a right to propagate their religion. There is certainly no mention of a right to change one's religion. (Arinze 1998, 10-11)

"Among contemporary Muslims, Fethullah Gülen may be one of the most interesting partners for Christians engaged in dialogue with Islam." So says Dr. Pim Valkenberg, a theologian noted for his research on Christian-Muslim dialogue. (Valkenberg 2005, 1**)** Finally, then, please refer to Table 9 to review Gülen's set of obstacles to dialogue.

Table 9. Reasons Why Muslims Have Problems with Dialogue
Fethullah Gülen

1. Many Muslims have been killed recently by Christians—in the last century and continuing today in Afganistan, Iraq, and other places. Therefore, many Muslims tend to think that the West attempts to continue this aggression with more subtle means, such as dialogue (often perceived as mere proclamation of the Gospel).
2. The lasting influence of colonialism
3. The desire to become independent from the West
4. The distorted image of Islam as a degeneration of religion, and of the Prophet as an imposter.

In assessing Gülen's four reasons, Valkenberg considers the first three primarily political in nature; only the last reason is theological. He concludes: "…Muslim suspicions about Christian invitations to dialogue are primarily political in nature, not theological." (Valkenberg 2005, 5)

This observation leads us now to a survey of some of the non-theological issues that impede interreligious dialogue.

Cultural, Political, and Other Existential Conflict Issues

Imperialism, Globalization, and Islamic Revivalism

The events of September 11, 2001 demonstrated unambiguously the degree of breakdown in Christian-Muslim cultural and political dialogue in our own time. Although the theologians and philosophers during the latter half of the 20th century engaged in dialogue that "turned from a rivulet into a roaring river," (Nasr 1998, 1), 9-11 was emblematic of the utter breakdown of effective dialogue at all levels. Although the events of 9-11 vastly complicated future intercultural and international dialogue, they also helped to illuminate some of the causes of the dialogic breakdown.

In a review of religious perspectives on the causes and consequences of 9-11, Ian Markham notes Ibrahim Abu-Rabi's historical survey of relations between the Muslim world and the West.:

> Reaching as far back as the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Abu-Rabi' argues that Muslim-Western relations have been soured by the forces of imperialism, globalization, and Islamic revivalism. Focusing in particular on social and educational conditions in Saudi Arabia, the home of Bin Laden, Abu-Rabi' concludes that the Muslim world desperately needs to foster a more pluralistic and democratic environment, where opposing political and religious opinions can be freely expressed. (Markham 2002)

Markham also notes Christian theologian Kelton Cobb's controversial idea that "there is a violent recessive gene in every religious tradition."

> Cobb suggests that Al Qaeda represents a real, though bloody and immoral, strand of Islam which should be recognized and acknowledged as having textual validity. Cobb goes on to describe the role of "founding myths" in the development of religious bigotry, highlighting violent episodes in the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In an

> attempt to explain Bin Laden's motivation for the attacks, for example, Cobb highlights a 1998 interview that appeared on PBS's "Frontline" in which Bin Laden revealed an all-pervasive and shocking anti-Semitic worldview as at the root of his hatred for the American people. (Markham 2002)

Although Muslim leaders worldwide, including the Chief Mufti of Saudi Arabia and the leaders of all major Islamic organizations in the United States, issued strong statements denouncing the attacks as sinful and illegal, there were also Muslim voices calling for self-criticism in the West:

> At the same time, many Muslim leaders have not felt comfortable with the American military response to the acts of terrorism, apprehensive that it will lead to further interventions in Muslim lands that will only increase the suffering of ordinary people. In addition, Muslims perceive that Israeli aggression against Palestinians continues without American sanction; indeed, enormous financial and military support for Israel has continued. It seems that, any Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation is termed “terrorism,” and is responded to with overwhelming force. The result is the Palestinians themselves are increasingly showing less restraint in the force they employ to defend their families and lands. (Mattson 2002)

Ingrid Mattson, a Muslim, acknowledges the difficulties of self-criticism on both sides of the dialogic divide:

> It is also the case that it is often exceedingly difficult to sustain a self-critical attitude within revolutionary movements. When external threats are immense, dysfunction within a community is usually given little attention. This difficulty is apparent in any nation that faces a challenge to its security. Even many Americans have little patience for complaints about violations of immigrants’ rights, racist profiling or transgressions of internationally recognized rights of war captives in the wake of September 11th. The international Muslim community, feeling under siege for centuries since the beginning of European colonial rule, has similarly had great difficulty sustaining a self-critical attitude. Bold, charismatic revolutionary leaders have won the hearts of the people because they have given some hope for success against oppression. The inability of such leaders to address internal dysfunction has seemed less important for many people. (Mattson 2002)

Mattson also notes the influence of modern revolutionary discourse in the maintenance of this dialogic divide:

> A number of scholars have pointed out that the revolutionary discourse of many modern Muslim leaders has most in common with the ideologies of resistance employed

> by Third World national liberation and self-determination movements. Khaled Abou El Fadl writes that, "modern nationalistic thought exercised a greater influence on the resistance ideologies of Muslim and Arab national liberation movements than anything in the Islamic tradition. The Islamic tradition was reconstructed to fit Third World nationalistic ideologies of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism rather than the other way around." (Mattson 2002)

Elaborating on the dynamics of oppression and desperation, Mattson continues:

> Oppressive circumstances have disabled many Muslims, making them blind to the effectiveness of peaceful avenues of change, and deaf to the arguments of generations of Muslim scholars that revolt and lawlessness usually cause more harm to society than even government corruption. At the same time, when corruption is severe, when people are suffering continually under an oppressive government, a scholar who remains silent will lose all authority with the majority of people. (Mattson 2002)

Referring to the connection between extremism and state repression of legitimate protests of injustice, Mattson quotes from an article written after 9-11 by Anwar Ibrahim, former Minister of Finance of Malaysia:

> Bin Laden and his protégés are the children of desperation; they come from countries where political struggle through peaceful means is futile. In many Muslim countries, political dissent is simply illegal. Yet, year-by-year, the size of the educated class and the number of young professionals continue to increase. These people need space to express their political and social concerns. But state control is total, leaving no room for civil society to grow….In such circumstances, very few people—only those who are willing to risk losing everything: their property, their families, their security and their lives--will continue to speak out. Such individuals rarely limit their attempts to change state behavior through speech, because they have seen it to be ineffective. Indeed, in such circumstances, "extremism" might seem to be the only rational choice, because extreme actions are the only actions that seem to have an effect. (Mattson 2002)

In *A Reflection on 11 September*, Chrys McVey cites a Christian declaration on the events of 9-11-01:

> The latest issue of *Concilium* contains a declaration on the events of last September. 'Men and women inspired by their Christian faith... [are] concerned with the mindsets and the structures that are able to promote justice or injustice, that encourage either mutual regard or violent contempt for what is labeled as "other" to one's own group...'. The declaration makes several important points that offer a balanced perspective. 11 September, for example, 'should not conceal from our view the silent tragedies that take place daily and unnoticed by almost all the world's media in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America.' The September attacks 'became a media event in which fiction

> and reality were dramatically molded together while at the same time tens of thousands each day face their death ignored by the world or soon forgotten. Only those who fight against this one-sided forgetfulness have earned the right that their outrage over this new form of evil... will be taken seriously.' (McVey 2002)

In summarizing McVey's analysis for the causes of Muslim rage (McVey 2002), we can discern that issues of social injustice loom large, as summarized in Table 10:

Table 10. Reasons for Muslim Rage
Against the West
Chrys McVey

1. Crusades are a present reality
In view of the current U.S.-sponsored or supported wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, the Philippines, and other places, the U.S. President's use of the word in a speech was terribly inept.
2. Nostalgia for Islam's brilliant past (9th - 13th centuries)
At the end of this period, Muslim 'orthodoxy' reawakened and Islam choked. It was, writes Pakistani scholar, Pervez Hoodbhoy, 'the end of tolerance, intellect, and science in the Muslim world,' No longer would Muslim, Christian and Jewish scholars gather and work together in the Baghdad royal courts of Harun Al-Rashid. 'The last great Muslim thinker, Abd-al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, belonged to the 14th century.'
3. Colonialism / Imperialism
Muslim and Arab nationalism, part of a larger anti-colonialist current across the Third World, included the desire to control and use national resources for domestic benefit. The conflict with western greed was inevitable. Anyone willing to collaborate was preferred, even the ultraconservative Islamic regime of Saudi Arabia. After nationalizing British oil-fields in Iran, Mosaddeq was overthrown by a CIA coup in 1953. Britain targeted Nasser over the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, and Soekarno of Indonesia was replaced by Suharto.
4. Failure of "independent" secular governments
Pressed from outside, corrupt and incompetent from within, secular governments proved unable to defend national interests or deliver social justice and began to frustrate democracy. These failures left a vacuum which Islamic religious movements grew to fill. Khomeni in Iran, Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, Al-Nimeiry in Sudan, all instituted repressive regimes justified by their own brand of Islam.
5. Radicalization in Afghanistan
Lack of scruple and pursuit of power by the US combined fatally with the growing tide of new Islamic movements in 1979—when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. With Pakistan's Zia-ul-Haq America's foremost ally, the CIA advertised for, and openly recruited, Islamic holy warriors from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Algeria. 'Radical Islam went into overdrive as its superpower ally and mentor funneled support to the *mujahideen*,
6. Manipulation in Afghanistan
Ronald Reagan feted the *mujahideen* on the lawn of the White House, lavishing praise on "brave freedom fighters challenging the Evil Empire." But after the Soviet collapse, the US walked away from an Afghanistan in shambles. The Taliban emerged; Osama Bin Laden and

his Al-Qaeda made Afghanistan their base. 'Other groups', says Hoodbhoy, 'learned from the Afghan example and took up arms in their own countries.'

6. Plight of the Palestinians

In a video shown shortly after the September attacks, Osama gave as the motive for his actions, the plight of the Palestinians. This was disowned the very next day by Yasser Arafat, but the fact remains that for most Muslims, the illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the fact that the 1.4 million Arabs who are Israeli citizens are second-class citizens subjected to daily humiliation, has to be one of the main reasons explaining Muslim reaction to the lack of US even-handedness..

Finally, let's listen to Leonard Swidler in his 1992 *Introduction: The Evolution of a Dialogue*. His warning, almost ten years before 9-11-2001, about culture gap and the problem of the identification of Christianity with the "West" is noteworthy:

> A special word of caution to Jews and Christians entering into dialogue with Muslims is in order. They will be starting such a venture with several disadvantages: 1) the heritage of colonialism, 2) ignorance about Islam, 3) distorted image of Muslims, and 4) culture gap. …The vast majority of Muslims trained in Islamics are non-Westerners, which means they very likely come from a country that was until very recently a colony of the West. Many Muslims are still traumatized by Western colonialism and frequently identify Christianity, and to a lesser extent, Judaism, with the West. Jewish and Christian dialogue partners need to be aware of this and move to diffuse the problem. (Swidler 1992)

Cultural Stereotypes

Cultural, ethnic, and religious-identity stereotypes are major impediments to dialogic progress between Muslims and Christians. In a 2002 statement, the World Council of Churches stated that "It is the task of interreligious relations and dialogue to help prevent religion from becoming the fault line between communities." (World Council of Churches 2002) If it is true that this is at least one of the tasks of interreligious dialogue, then each religion must have a candid "image" of itself and the "other"--coupled with a commitment to a shared vision for the world. Unfortunately, though, strong, virulent stereotypes persist on both sides.

> It is a fact that many Christians with little education too often imagine Islam to be the religion of fatalism, legalism, and fear, of laxism, fanaticism, and opposition to progress. These are false accusations which continue to be directed toward Islam by numerous Christians. (Lanfry 1977)

Swidler notes a similar persistence of stereotypes:

> Most often the current Western image of a Muslim is a gross distortion of Islam. Indeed, it is frequently that of some kind of inhuman monster. But the Khomeini distortion of Islam is no more representative of Islam than the Rev. Ian Paisley of Northern Ireland is of Christianity in general or Richard Nixon was of the pacifist Quaker tradition. (Swidler 1992)

Because of the fundamental force of religious faith, if communities in conflict identify themselves or are identified exclusively by their religion, the situation becomes explosive, even able to tear apart communities that have lived in peace for centuries.

> Too often religious identities are drawn into conflict and violence. In some parts of the world, religion is increasingly identified with ethnicity, giving religious overtones to ethnic conflict. In other situations, religious identity becomes so closely related to power that the communities without power, or who are discriminated against, look to their religion as the force of mobilization of their dissent and protest. These conflicts tend to appear as, or are represented to be, conflict between religious communities, polarizing them along communal lines. Religious communities often inherit deep divisions, hatreds and enmities that are, in most cases, passed down through generations of conflict. (World Council of Churches 2002)

Even though stereotypes must be rejected for the possibility of authentic dialogue, a self-critical attitude will enable each religion to acknowledge its shortfalls and improvement opportunities—thereby opening a dialogue about shared needs. As a case in point, consider the observations of Anwar Ibrahim, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, a Muslim country in Southeast Asia that has a long history as a multicultural and multireligious society:

> But we are also deeply aware that the Muslim world is not without its excesses and internal contradictions. The negative image of the Muslims to the rest of the world is to a great extent the result of the failure of many Muslims themselves to realize and manifest their own ideals. Ignorance, injustice, corruption, hypocrisy and the erosion in moral rectitude are quite prevalent in contemporary Muslim societies. (Ibrahim 1995)

In a 1999 document, the World Council of Churches noted that:

> Christian views of Islam have been shaped, transmitted and perpetuated since the seventh century, sometimes through direct encounter but also, especially for those who do not interact routinely with Muslims, through polemical and apologetic literature. …Islam, is viewed by some Christians as inherently intolerant, violent and menacing.

> This view tends to disregard the fact that Islam has been and remains a dynamic tradition which inspires and nurtures the lives of hundreds of millions of Muslims. (World Council of Churches 1999)

In a speech to a youth conference after the Danish cartoon debacle about how Danes perceive Muslims, this observer says that, ironically, many religious prejudices mirror each other.

> …In radical Islamist denunciations of Western culture, one reads about people in the West as being selfish, materialistic, aggressive and militant, without respect for women, having double standards, and being generally unethical. Well, this is more or less a replica of the criticism of Muslims in the right-wing Western press. Also, both parties have a tendency to compare their own ideals to the crassest realities in the other place. (Skovgaard-Petersen 2006, 2)

Addressing common stereotypes that Christians have of Muslims, Hans Küng observed that Muslim societies have different way of experiencing the relationship between religion and culture:

> To a great extent Christians still regard Islam as a rigid entity, a closed religious system, rather than a living religion, a religious movement that has been continually changing through the centuries, developing great inner variety, all the time shared by real persons with a wide spectrum of attitudes and feelings. I think no one has done more than Wilfred Cantwell Smith to make it clear that Islam is not just a system of the past or a collection of theories we have to study, but a reality today; Professor Smith has urged us to make an attempt to understand *from the inside* why Muslims see God and the world, service to God and to their fellows, politics, law, and art with different eyes, why they experience these things with different feelings from those of Christians. Keeping Iran in mind, we must first grasp the fact that even today the Islamic religion is not just another strand in the life of a Muslim, what secularized persons like to refer to as the "religious factor" or "sector" alongside other "cultural factors" or "sectors." No, life and religion, religion and culture, are dynamically interwoven. Islam strives to be an all-embracing view, an all-encompassing perspective on life, an all-determining way of life—and so in the midst of this life a way to eternal life. Islam is referred to as paradise, salvation, liberation, redemption, but it is not just a way in this life, with the focus on only the here and now." (Küng 1987, 161)

Conflicting Cultures and Stories

Clash of Civilizations?

Is dialogue between Christians and Muslims to be construed primarily as dialogue between two peoples aligned in opposing civilizations? This question can be seen lurking in the folds of a controversial theory: that people's cultural/religious identity will be the primary cause of conflict in the post-Cold War world. Samuel P. Huntington was Eaton Professor of the Science of Government and Director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University at the time he formulated the theory in a 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article: "The Clash of Civilizations?" In that article, Huntington writes:

> It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. (Huntington 1993)

Huntington expanded his thesis in a 1996 book: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. After the events of 9-11, this idea has gained new attention and cachet. But if we adopt Huntington's theory as essentially correct, we can only conclude that even the most heroic efforts at interreligious dialogue are futile at this point in history.

Huntington's view has been questioned in many quarters. Here for example, this Muslim speaker is dismissive of Huntington's theory and blames its "essentialist" assumptions for discouraging ongoing study of modern Muslim thinking:

> There is little interest in how Muslims engage with their religious tradition, simply because they are considered the products of this tradition, and not its contemporary producers. Another word for this attitude on behalf of many in Danish society is Orientalism, which I shall define as the ideology of an essential and unbridgeable difference between Western and Eastern Civilizations. The idea of a world composed of a handful of mutually-exclusive civilizations based on religious core beliefs

> is yet another Orientalism, a-historical and essentialist as it is. Moreover, as this is taken as a given the historical fact, the people who espouse it don't even feel the need to study the development of modern Muslim thinking, as actual historical developments are considered of little consequence in comparison with these alleged core values. (Skovgaard-Petersen 2006, 2)

We have noted that various political, economic, and other existential conditions create significant barriers to dialogue. But after peeling away the more obvious layers of historical friction, we uncover fundamental, attitudinal problems facing Muslims—especially attitudes toward modernism and modernity. (Nasr 1998, 20) For Muslims, "…the divine imperative as expressed in the *Qur'an* is unambiguous. Humanity has been created to form tribes, races and nations, whose differences in physical characteristics, languages and modes of thought are but the means for the purpose of *li-ta'arafu*—"getting to know one another." (Ibrahim 1995, 2) But,

> …in the narrative of modernity, the story of the encounter is less straightforward. It is the progressive globalization of a particular language of discourse issuing from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, that being the only true and possible discourse for mankind." (Ibrahim 1995, 2)

Nasr and Ibrahim are only two of many Muslim voices that have questioned or warned of the confrontation between the culture of the Enlightenment Christian West and the culture of an authentic *Qur'anic* Islam. On the Christian side, we can hear similar voices:

> Most difficult of all is the fact that a huge cultural gap exists between the great majority of Muslims and precisely those Jews and Christians who are open to dialogue. In brief. Islam as a whole has not yet really experienced the "Enlightenment" and come to terms with it, as has much of the Judeo-Christian tradition, although obviously not all of it. Only a minority of Muslim Islamics scholars will share the "deabsolutized" understanding of truth needed to be able and want to enter into dialogue with "the other," that is, to converse with the religiously "other" primarily to learn religiously from her or him—which means that many efforts at dialogue with Muslims will in fact be prolegomena to true interreligious dialogue. Frequently such attempts will be not unlike "dialogue" with many Orthodox Jews or evangelical Christians—or with Catholics before Vatican II. (Swidler 1992)

Certainly, one sign of culture clash is the alienation of cultural minorities—a phenomenon that can be seen in predominantly Christian countries as well as in predominantly

Muslim ones. For example, in an editorial that appeared in *The Tablet* after the 2005 London suicide bombings, a journalist notes:

> The week the nation remembered the victims of the London suicide bombings a year ago also became the week the nation agonized over the degree of alienation of its Muslim population. The bombers were young British Muslims who appeared to think that their religion justified them in an indiscriminate attack on their fellow citizens. The Prime Minister told the Muslim community this week that the issue that should concern them was the misuse of Islam to justify terrorism, and that this was an internal religious issue rather than one where the Government has a role. (Pepinster 2006)

Pepinster notes a parallel between the challenge facing modern Islam and the challenge facing the Catholic Church at the beginning of the last century in its struggle with modernism:

> A hundred years ago, convinced that the modern world was a threat, the Church then—like fundamentalist Muslims now—was implacably opposed to democracy, religious tolerance and human rights. Now, thanks to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and Pope John XXIII, it has no hesitation in standing up for them. But such changes cannot be triggered by governments. Mr Blair was right that the real challenge from terrorism conducted in the name of Islam is to Islam itself. (Pepinster 2006)

Indeed, some even see religion-based alienation as more fundamental—involving the need for trust of the "other."

> Religious identity is stronger than ethnic or cultural identity. It tends to build walls between people. However, we cannot allow these walls to stand. There are difficulties here. Our respective histories are full of contradictory experiences. Because of the absence of frank dialogue we have become suspicious of one another. Despite our differences, however, we are all part of one human community. We must live together and trust the other. This is the destiny of humanity. How can we do this? How can I trust the "other" and build morally sustainable communities? What are the most efficient ways of building trust in a new world context?" (Aram I 2002)

It seems that a clash of civilizations is inevitable if at least one of the civilizations persists in holding an absolutist view of the truth of its religious identity. Locked into certitudes that preclude trust, dialogue, and compromise, conflicts with the certitudes of others seems inevitable. So, related to the question of civilizational clash is the issue of the degree to which a civilization allows and promotes freedom of thought for deconstructing the old certitudes.

> Despite the facts of the cultural gap and that only a minority of Muslim Islamicists have a "deabsolutized" view of truth, there are today many more of them than is usually recognized. Often, however, they live outside the Muslim world. (Swidler 1992)

Quoting from Fazlur Rahman, Swidler observes that the importance of freedom of thought is apparent to at least some Muslim intellectuals:

> This point was made poignantly by Fazlur Rahman: "Free thought and thought are synonymous, and one cannot hope that thought will survive without freedom .... Islamic thought, like all thought, equally requires a freedom by which dissent, confrontation of views, and debate between ideas is assured." (Swidler 1992)

As another example of critical thinking among Muslim Islamicists, Swidler quotes the Yugoslavian Muslim Smail Balic:

> In regard to research into the real occasions for the individual revelations of the *Qur'an* and the consequent legal philosophy, not enough is done seriously to distinguish the time-bound elements from the enduring. The knowledge that the *Qur'an* is in part also a collection of time-related documents from the early history of Islam has not yet been able to move beyond pure theory. (Swidler 1992)

Just the possibility that Huntington's thesis might be essentially correct should be sufficient motivation for Christians and Muslims to begin a re-evaluation of their absolutist, doctrinally-rigid views of their revealed truths—a rereading of their collections of "time-related documents."

The One True Story

Much of the current theological discourse between Christians and Muslims is still characterized by insistence that only one "story" makes sense—namely, ours. A rigid either/or logic is still dominant. The basic disjunctive argument goes something like this:

> Either we are right or not
> But we are right—as we know from our firm and true belief (Bible or *Qur'an*)
> Therefore, you are wrong.

This is exactly the kind of impass that many, perhaps most, Christians and Muslims find themselves at if they focus on their incompatible doctrines.

> If Christians think that Christ is God's final and unsurpassable revelation–in the same manner as Muslims think that the *Qur'ān* is God's final and unsurpassable revelation–they have great difficulty to recognize Muhammad as God's prophet and messenger because that would jeopardize their confession of Christ as God's final Word. (Valkenberg 2005, 6**)**

Exclusivist doctrines and religious intolerance form theological "brick walls" that are virtually impossible to surmount. Being the truly "chosen" ones, inevitably reduces the others to a subordinate status as "left behinds." Exclusivist religious viewpoints tend to assume some type of religious superiority—a "last word" in the theological debate:

> Muslims all over the world are using one language, which is Arabic, in calling their God, in their prayers, pilgrimage and in their greetings to each other. Also this unity of language had been prophesied in Zephaniah 3:9: "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." Alas the Truth has come in Arabic, but some still expect Prophet Jesus (PBUH), who might teach mankind to worship Allah in one unique language in his second coming. We Muslims are sure that Prophet Jesus in his second coming will join the Muslims in their mosques as he is like any other Muslim, circumcised, not eating pork, and performing prayers with ablution, standing, bowing and prostration. (Baagil 1984)

Not surprisingly, attitudes of religious superiority tend to translate into attitudes of religious intolerance. In this regard, consider Marmaduke Pickthall's comments on the history of Christian intolerance:

> In Spain under the Umayyads and in Baghdad under the Abbasid Khalifas, Christians and Jews, equally with Muslims, were admitted to the Schools and universities —not only that, but were boarded and lodged in hostels at the cost of the state. When the Moors were driven out of Spain, the Christian conquerors held a terrific persecution of the Jews. Those who were fortunate enough to escape fled, some of them to Morocco and many hundreds to the Turkish empire, where their descendants still live in separate communities, and still speak among themselves an antiquated form of Spanish. The Muslim empire was a refuge for all those who fled from persecution by the Inquisition. …The Western Christians, till the arrival of the Encyclopaedists in the eighteenth century, did not know and did not care to know, what the Muslim believed, nor did the Western Christian seek to know the views of Eastern Christians with regard to them. The Christian Church was already split in two, and in the end, it came to such a pass that the Eastern Christians, as Gibbon shows, preferred Muslim rule, which allowed them to practice their own form of religion and adhere to their peculiar dogmas, to the rule of

> fellow Christians who would have made them Roman Catholics or wiped them out. (Hameed 2006)

In fact, from the Muslim viewpoint, only their scripture offers a basis for religious tolerance:

> And argue not with the People of the Scripture (including Christians and Jews), unless it be in a most kindly manner, save with such of them as do wrong; and say: 'We believe in that which hath been revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and unto Him we surrender.'(Quaran –XXIX; 46-Pickthall translation modified)

Indeed, as one Muslim scholar claims, "Before the coming of Islam it [tolerance] had never been preached as an essential part of religion." (Hameed 2006) Nevertheless, today there are ample examples of Muslim countries with Islamic theocracies that limit or curtail religious freedoms. Perhaps, just as the Christians had to set themselves apart from the Jews and the pagans of the Roman Empire to forge their new religious identity, so too did the Muslims have to set themselves apart from the Jews and Christians:

> Many of our contemporaries are surprised, even scandalized by the absolutist theocracy of Islam. Historically speaking, Islam faced the Byzantine Empire with its elaborate theocracy and cultural hegemony. Islam responded by adopting the Byzantine synthesis in order to prevent itself from succumbing to the temptation of returning to the yoke of that dominant group. ("Muhammad is the response of the Semitic world to Alexander's conquests." C. Dawson.) Are we able to recognize ourselves in the mirror which, in certain respects, Islam holds up to us? Perhaps we do not like looking at this mirror, given our various revolutions: the French Revolution, the Enlightenment etc. (Standaert 2005)

The dialogical impass produced by disjunctive, domineering doctrines in Christianity and Islam can be detected perhaps most directly in examining the issue of religious liberty for minority religious groups. This Muslim author notes as much:

> A fundamental problem facing both Muslims and non-Muslims who wish to engage one another in serious interreligious dialogue has been the traditional Muslim position that all non-Muslims perforce will be second-class citizens in any state where the Muslims obtain political power. A similar domineering attitude prevailed until just a few decades ago in Roman Catholicism, making it almost impossible for Catholics to enter into dialogue with non-Catholics until Vatican II (1962-54). Similarly, dialogue with orthodox Marxists from countries under Communist control today still suffers from a like disability. Clearly, an essential question for dialogue with Islam, then, is whether full

> equality between Muslims and non-Muslims can be reconciled with the major sources of Islam, the *Qur'an* and *sunna*. If so, how? (An-Na'im 1988)

Both the Christian and Muslim stories claim to value mutual respect, tolerance, and peace. But at a conceptual level, their exclusivist and divergent theologies have made it difficult to translate those values into sustained behaviors over the past centuries of shared history. And at an existential level, especially in today's world of fast-changing geopolitical and economic forces, mutual respect, tolerance, and peace between Christians and Muslims seem to be as fragile and elusive as ever. It is a really very old story—the difficulty of practicing what we preach:

> Islam is stated by some to be a religion of peace. Actually, over its long centuries of expansion, it is not. But neither is Christianity, except possibly for its first three centuries until it became the state religion of the Byzantine Empire. (Drummond 2005, x)

Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, we can postulate a minimal dialogue in which both "orthodox" Christians and Muslims could at least agree that their historical hypocrisy is certainly ample evidence of the power of the evil one, the Father of Lies, *Shaitan*.

> Powerful forces are at work seeking to "demonize" the other in contemporary Christian-Muslim relations. Both sides have reasons, even of massive significance, for legitimate complaint. But our respective faiths and practices have their better sides, and the best of our representatives believe that the God whom we both worship is calling us to peace, to reconciliation—with perhaps varying modes of repentance—to mutual respect, and even to cooperation. (Drummond 2005, 193)

The foregoing outline of the major current hindrances or improvement opportunities in Christian-Muslim dialogue is only a very rough sketch of the problems. They are not superficial or short-term problems. Instead, these challenges to mutual understanding and respect derive from deep cultural and doctrinal differences between Christians and Muslims. Keeping in view the seriousness of some of these problems and the urgency of the need to resolve them peacefuly, we turn our attention at last to a consideration of some possible strategies for avoiding the

hindrances and for seizing opportunities that, so far, have been ignored or beyond our cooperative reach.

3. CONDITIONS FOR IMPROVING CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

The Christian-Muslim history of mutual ignorance, doubt, suspicion, fear, and violence is incontrovertible. Given the gravity of the conflicts of our own day, it seems equally clear that Christian-Muslim relations are now at a critical juncture where either the voice of reason or the voice of violence will prevail. Certainly, the voice of reason is the voice of dialogue. Yet, as we have glimpsed, interreligious dialogue can create a Gordian knot of conflicting theological concepts, assumptions, doctrines, and related practices—all embedded within a complex manifold of social, political, economic, and other existential conditions that are problematic in their own ways.

Now, finally, we turn to a review of some of the key conditions for achieving more effective dialogue in our own time. Many of these conditions relate directly to the obstacles and challenges we have already surveyed. Some of these improvement conditions are supervening requirements or dialogic environments that are entailed by a commitment to authentic, interreligious dialogue. Again, because of the complexity of the issues and over-lapping levels of discourse, our review here is merely summative. Likewise, our assessments of the relative probabilities of achieving certain key conditions for improved dialogue are merely informed approximations.

We begin by distinguishing various forms of dialogue under consideration here. Next, we identify four specific, necessary conditions necessary for any successful dialogue—interreligious or otherwise:

1. Suspicion Must Be Dispelled.
2. The Unique Identity of the Other Must Be Acknowledged.
3. Human Freedom Must Be Affirmed.

4. Our Limitations as Continuous Learners Must Be Accepted.

Then, we will briefly examine the major apparent conditions for more effective interreligious-*theological* dialogue:

5. General Agreement on Divine Revelation (*Wahy*)
6. General Agreement on the Stature of Muhammad as Prophet
7. General Agreement on the Status of the *Qur'an*
8. General Agreement on Statements of the Unity of the Divine Principle
9. General Agreement on Salvation (*falaah*) Doctrines
10. General Agreement on Divine Law (*Shari'ah*)
11. General Agreement on the Destiny of Jerusalem
12. General Agreement on Evangelization (*Da'wah*)
13. Developing a Cogent Theology of Religions

And recognizing that all human dialogue occurs within a global milieu of philosophical, cultural, social, political, economic, and other levels of discourses and texts, we will finally consider the apparent conditions for more effective interreligious-*existential* dialogue between Christians and Muslims:

14. Rethinking Civilizational Friction Dynamics
15. Revising Our Understanding of Relativism and the Encounter of Cultures
16. Planning and Supporting Social, Political, and Economic Improvements
17. Understanding Theology as Dialogue
18. Attending More to the Spiritual Dimension

For each of these conditions, we will judge whether the probability of improvement in a condition or set of conditions is high or low—where improvement is meant as positive dialogic developments or advancements by at least the middle of this 21st century.

We will conclude this investigation by forming a summative assessment of the probability of improvement for all conditions. Our steadfast aim: to determine, as best we can, whether the prospects for interreligious dialogue at the beginning of this century are, on balance, hopeful or not.

Forms of Dialogue

Dialogue as Dimension, Category, and Essence

In his 1968 essay, *Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or Dialogue*, Isma'il Al Faruqi offers an expansive definition of "dialogue" that cautions about the corrosive effects of skepticism and cynicism:

> "Dialogue" then is a dimension of human consciousness (as long as that consciousness is not skeptical), a category of the ethical sense (as long as that sense is not cynical). It is the altruistic arm of Islam and of Christianity, their reach beyond themselves. Dialogue is education at its widest and noblest. It is the fulfillment of the command of reality to become known, to be compared and contrasted with other claims, to be acquiesced in if true, amended if inadequate, and rejected if false. (Al Faruqi 1968)

Al Faruqi asserts that dialogue is not just an activity that can or should engage both Christians and Muslims; it is, in fact, an essential process of these two religions:

> Dialogue, in short, is the only kind of inter-human relationship worthy of man! Vouching for Islam and, unless my reading of Christianity has completely deceived me, for Christianity as well, dialogue is of the essence of the two faiths, the theater of their eventual unity as the religion of God, the religion of truth. (Al Faruqi 1968)

If Al Faruqi's view of dialogue as "of the essence" of Islam and Christianity is true, then it seems clear that interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims must continue to progress if both of these religions are to achieve their purposes. Other Muslim scholars may not agree with Al Faruqi's concept of interreligious dialogue. For example, in a 1971 book by Fr. Youakim Moubarac that brought together the replies of seven Muslim intellectuals from North Africa, Egypt, Iran, and India to questions concerning relations with Christians, one respondent "…considered that dialogue was for the Christian conscience what 'cooperation' was for former colonialist countries: a new language adopted to the post-colonialist situation." (Moubarac 1971, 121) (cited in Donohue 1996, 4) It seems that a reasonable person would set aside that viewpoint as unsupported by any credible evidence. But we should not be surprised that even very smart

and thoughtful individuals sometimes get it very wrong—especially when they are angry. Together with Al Faruqi, we can also see this suspicious attitude quickly spawning discourses of skepticism and cynicism.

Deconstructing Dialogues

In *Christian Muslim Dialogue—A Survey of Recent Developments*, Michael Fitzgerald details the impressive record of contact and dialogue between Christians and Muslims from about 1970 to the turn of this new century. He offers an operational definition of interreligious dialogue that takes pains to note what such dialogue is not: neither a betrayal of mission nor a new method of conversion—an interesting parallel with Al Faruqi's cautions about skepticism and cynicism:

> Dialogue is a two-way communication. It implies speaking and listening, giving and receiving, for mutual growth and enrichment. It includes witness to one's own faith as well as an openness to that of the other. It is not a betrayal of mission of the Church, nor is it a new method of conversion to Christianity. This has been clearly stated in the encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II *Redemptoris Missio*. This view is also developed in the two documents produced by the PCID: *The Attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Followers of Other Religious Traditions: reflections on Dialogue and Mission* (1984), and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991). (Fitzgerald 2000)

We have already distinguished two broad types of interreligious dialogue: theological and existential. To elaborate further, refer to Table 11 for a "…fourfold typology of dialogue as given by recent Vatican documents (cf. *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions* (1984), nn. 28-35; *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), n. 42…" (Fitzgerald 2000):

Table 11. Four Forms of Dialogue
Michael Fitzgerald - PCID

1. Dialogue of Life
Provides an understanding and a harmony between individuals and

communities strong enough to resist being broken by outside influences.
2. Dialogue of Deeds
Dialogue with a common response to the effects of war, will reinforce the will to ban armed conflict as a way of resolving disputes.
3. Dialogue of Discourse
The specialist dialogue will help to clarify issues, and also to plan strategies.
4. Dialogue of Religious Experience
Helps to provide motivation and will also be a source of strength to persevere.

In the following discussion, the term "interreligious-*theological*" should be understood as including the third and fourth forms identified by the PCID: dialogues of discourse and religious experience. References to "interreligious-*existential*" should be understood as including the PCID's first two forms: dialogues of life and deeds. Also, note should be taken of how "theological" dialogue will be understood as relating to "existential" dialogue (life and deeds):

> When mention is made of dialogue it is usually formal discussion between experts that comes to mind. It must be stated clearly that this is not the only form of dialogue, but it does have its own importance. It should serve to facilitate the dialogue of life and the dialogue of deeds by clarifying ideas and dissipating prejudices. (Fitzgerald 2000)

Writing about how the Catholic Church understands its dialogue with other religious traditions, Machado uses the *Logos* metaphor:

> Christianity has its starting-point in the incarnation of the Word. Here, it is not simply a case of man seeking God, but of God who comes in Person to speak to man of Himself and to show him the path by which He may be reached. ...The Incarnate Word is thus the fulfillment of the yearning present in all the religions of mankind. …A Christian enters into dialogue with people of different religious traditions because he or she is aware that the action of Christ and his Spirit is already mysteriously present in all who live sincerely according to their religious convictions. (Machado 1999)

Shapes of Dialogue

At the turn of this century and millennium, Christianity and Islam appear to be at a crucial pivot point in the progress of their dialogues at all levels. Increasing dialogue involves increasing the number of Christians and Muslims who actually talk with each other about their basic beliefs. Yet, except for some professional philosophers, theologians, social scientists, and a

smattering of other small groups, Muslim-Christian dialogue is generally ignored. For the common person, the discourse between Christians and Muslims is mostly glimpsed via the popular media—a one-way channel for spectators, not participants. In reviewing six major documents on interreligious dialogue, Renard notes:

> Closely connected with the need for Christian realism is another matter hinted at in [*The Muslim-Christian Dialogue of the Last Ten Years*—Pro Mundi Vita] but otherwise not approached in the [other] documents. It is the evident fact that there are surely as many Muslims as there are Christians who have given no thought to, much less actively desire, dialogue. Muslim-Christian dialogue is simply not "popular" in any sense of the word. … in the final analysis, realism in dialogue requires that one acknowledge, without losing enthusiasm for dialogue, that not everyone is willing to listen. (Renard 1992)

The activities of global media can both hinder and promote improved interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The episode of the Danish cartoons is a clear example of how, in today's world, a local media mistake can become a global media headline:

> The 12 cartoons printed in the Danish paper Jyllandsposten on on September 30th 2005 caused within the following months an international crisis of huge proportions. …From very early in October a growing number of individuals and groups in Denmark launched initiatives to voice their critique of the publication of the cartoons as they all felt they were insulting to Muslims. They did not question the fundamental right of the paper to do what the paper did—but they maintained a principle critique of the way the freedom of expression was used or rather misused by the Danish paper. …In my opinion the cartoon-issue is the first example of how the new global media will be an active player in the future. Without the new media the crisis would never have developed at the speed we experienced from the middle of November to the middle of February. Without the new media the crisis would have remained a local crisis confined to a Danish context. (Simonsen 2006)

On the upside, global media can also precipitate widespread discussion and debate—enabling simultaneous global learning:

> My hope is that we will be able to prove in the future that we have all learned from the crisis ignited by the cartoons. No one can any longer doubt the existence of a globalised world. The way the question of the cartoons was spread around the world at an unpredicted speed is a clear sign, that globalisation is no longer an idea—it is part and parcel of the world in which we live. (Simonsen 2006)

Necessary Conditions for Any Successful Dialogue

Suspicion Must Be Dispelled.

Current Situation: BAD

Intercultural and interreligious suspicions wax or wane as world events change. Currently, because of the unresolved Israel-Palestine issue and the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afganastin, suspicions and fears abound. This raises the question of whether it is better to forget the past or not. For example: *Nostra Aetate* states:

> Although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, the Council urges all parties that, forgetting past 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" (Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, n. 3).

Fethullah Gülen's method of dialogue takes the same position: forgetting the arguments of the past, and concentrating on common points. But not all agree with the path of forgetting:

> Such appeals to ignore the differences run the risk of narrowing interreligious dialogue down to a form of polite conversation that is not very helpful when religious violence determines the larger context of this dialogue. Focusing on common points may be an important strategy when mutual suspicions are still prevalent, but if dialogue is to change the mentality of the partners involved, a 'reconciliation of memories' has to take place. (Valkenberg 2005, 7**)**

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

There is broad agreement that this condition is basic to the process of dialogue. Al Faruqi offers a typical Muslim view:

> No genuine and effective cooperation can proceed without mutual esteem and respect, without agreement on purposes, final objectives and standards. If it is to last through the generations and withstand the excruciating travails that it must and will face in the construction of a viable world-*ecumene*, cooperation must be firmly based on a communion of faith in ultimate principles, on communion in religion. (Al Faruqi 1968)

Displacing suspicion, Michael Fitzgerald clarifies that *Nostra Aetate* calls for an attitude of esteem for Muslims—an attitude grounded in basic Christian beliefs:

> The theological bases for this attitude of esteem are found dispersed throughout the various documents of the Council. God wills the salvation of all. The whole human race is united in its origin and its destiny. God is active in the hearts of human beings, drawing them to him, as he is active in the different religious rites which give corporate expression to the human response to God. (Fitzgerald 2000)

The Unique Identity of the Other Must Be Acknowledged.

Current Situation: GOOD

Related to dispelling suspicion and promoting esteem for each other is the matter of dispelling sterotypes:

> In dialogue we strive towards mutual respect. Dialogue partners are responsible for hearing and listening to the self-understanding of each other's faith. Trust and confidence comes from allowing partners to define themselves, refraining from proselytism, and providing an opportunity for mutual questioning, and if appropriate justified criticism. Such practices promote an informed understanding of each other, which becomes the basis for all other relationships. (World Council of Churches 2002)

In this area, the role of global media, including the Internet, cannot be underestimated.

> We have learned that you cannot talk about Moslems as one homogenous entity. In Denmark we have Moslems from Pakistan, Palestine, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan—just to mention some origins of Moslem immigrants to Denmark. (Nissen 2006)

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

Both Christians and Muslims have strong motivations to learn more about each other—at least to the point of accepting the fact of our differences. For Christians, the emphasis on the imperative of religious freedom assumes respect for our distinct identies—as groups and individuals. In an address by Benedict XVI at a meeting with some representatives of some Muslim communities at the XX World Youth Day in Cologne, he noted the relationship between respect and religious freedom:

> Only through recognition of the centrality of the person can a common basis for understanding be found, one which enables us to move beyond cultural conflicts and which neutralizes the disruptive power of ideologies. … The lessons of the past must help us to avoid repeating the same mistakes. We must seek paths of reconciliation and learn to live with respect for each other's identity. The defence of religious freedom, in this sense, is a permanent imperative, and respect for minorities is a clear sign of true civilization. (Benedict XVI 2005a)

Related to the issue of recognizing and accepting our unique identies, the issue of cultural and social individualization has become one of the dominant ideas in current research on Islam. Frank Peter cites several examples, including Jocelyne Cesari who observes:

> [The] social adaptation process of Muslim minority groups has placed Islam within the three interrelated paradigms of secularization, individualization, and privatization, which have until recently been distinctive characteristics of Western societies (Peter 2006)

Human and Religious Freedom Must Be Affirmed.

Current Situation: BAD

Closely coupled with the issue of respect for the individual identity of the other, is the concept of the dignity of the individual as a free agent. Theologically at least, Muslims and Christians agree that the dignity of the human person entails the autonomy of the individual's conscience and the right to religious freedom: Shahul Hameed articulates an informed Muslim's theological view well:

> To a Muslim, religious belief must come out of a person's free choice, as God has also commanded not to use any kind of coercion in the matter of religion: "Let there be no compulsion in religion, truth stands out clear from error." [Al-Baqarah 2:256]…It is the conviction of a religion's adherents, not the compulsion they can impose on others, that establishes its moral force on earth. This was a principle evident in the life and practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) as well as the Constitution of Madinah which he drew up with the multi-religious community of Madinah. (Hameed 2006)

But in fact, the struggle to extend human and religious freedoms has so far proved to be hard and long. Progress is slow overall and regression is common in areas of armed conflict.

Probability of Improvement: LOW

Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the United States episcopate's Committee on International Policy, in testimony before a congressional panel, called for positive efforts to understand and engage Islam and Muslim leaders and to promote religious freedom for Christians in some Muslim countries.

> Some of the most significant challenges for religious freedom and forging constructive roles for religion in world affairs are developing relationships between Christians and Muslims, Bishop Wenski stated. …"The violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and several conflicts in Africa come close to being perceived, in overly simplistic terms, as just conflicts of East versus West, of all of Islam versus all of Christianity," he said. (Zenit 2006b)

Pope Benedict XVI has made numerous calls for reciprocity in extending religious freedoms—including Islamic religious instruction which he views as a vehicle for the integration of Muslims into Western society. According to one observer, Benedict XVI maintains that:

> ...it is very important for Muslim children to have the opportunity to attend in our schools an hour of instruction, in German, in the Muslim religion, with teachers who have been trained in Germany and under school supervision. …But he joins it to precise conditions…[no] conflict in the content of the instruction with respect to our constitution, for example with regard to civil rights, from religious freedom to the equality between man and woman to marriage. (Magister 2006).

Reciprocity in extending religious freedoms will come slowly and haltingly as each side gauges the effects of its own behavior on the other.

Our Limitations as Continuous Learners Must Be Accepted.

Current Situation: BAD

Following one's own religion and learning its theology is difficult and complex. Learning the practices and beliefs of another religion is even more difficult and complex. And distinguishing authentic forms of a religion from its various deviations is no simple matter even for the experts—as the long trail of theological and interreligious debate demonstrates.

> Islam is not self-explanatory; it is a religious tradition that needs to be interpreted and claimed. As a practicing Muslim, I believe that there is a core of fundamental beliefs and practices that distinguish authentic Islam from deviations. I also believe that apart from this essential core, the task of interpreting the application of Islamic norms to human society is an enormously complicated task, which inevitably leads to a broad range of opinion and practice. I agree with " Sunni" Muslims, the majority of the Muslim community worldwide, that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, no one has the right to claim infallibility in the interpretation of sacred law. (Mattson 2002)

Muslims are not the only ones who have problems struggling with the tension between orthodoxy and heterodox innovations (or deviations, depending on one's viewpoint). Western people have their own, similar challenges in "remembering" their basic beliefs. Referring to the thought of the Muslim intellectual Fethullah Gülen, Valkenberg notes:

> Gülen states that Christianity and Islam can learn from each other: the West has its technological and scientific supremacy, while Islam is supreme in its religious fervor. It is certainly true that Islam, precisely as religion of submissiveness to God, may be an incitement for Western people to remember their religious roots. (Valkenberg 2005, 9**)**

Probability of Improvement: LOW

About thirty years ago, Jacques Lanfry said that the Christian "….must be on the alert to discover the sincere efforts at renewal being made in contemporary Islamic thought." (Lanfry 1977) Quoting from an interview given to the Lebanese daily, *L'Orient*, by Father Joseph Cuoq, Lanfry notes:

> … it must be added, the great mass of Christians have yet to learn from those responsible what is this renovated outlook with regard to the Muslims which the Second Vatican Council bids them develop in the spirit of the Gospel. Owing to historical analyses and to the efforts of conversion realized in recent years, the Christian authorities are quite aware for the future of the various prejudices to be combated. Thus the *Guidelines* of the Secretariat for Non-Christians acknowledge that "we have to make a thorough re-evaluation of our way of looking at things. We are referring in particular to certain 'ready-made' judgments often proffered to the detriment of Islam. A fundamental point would seem to be to avoid harboring in our innermost hearts hasty or rash judgments which would appear ludicrous to any sincere Muslim. (Lanfry 1977)

Today, thirty years later, a fair consensus would be that the "great mass of Christians have yet to learn from those responsible what is this renovated outlook with regard to the

Muslims." A global, culturally- and religiously-integrated educational program needs to be launched—a program that exploits the advantages of modern Internet media like streaming video, email, blogs, wikis, and web sites. This program would need to employ sophisticated distance-learning tools and techniques. Unfortunately, this complex, continuous-interreligious-learning program would be very expensive to develop and maintain. Although many of the "building blocks" for this global program already exist as religious-research sites, news feeds, databases, etc., there appears to be little movement toward planning the next steps for helping all religious believers continue to learn and even dialogue in "cyber spaces" for respectful encounters—at various levels of knowledge of the "other."

Conditions for More Effective Interreligious-*Theological* Dialogue

In general, agreeing with Michael Fitzgerald, we can say that theological dialogue seeks to clarify ideas and dissipate prejudices. In interreligious dialogues especially, these are very elusive goals. The interlocutors must profoundly understand the spiritual messages of the Bible and of the *Qur'an*, as well as the writings of spiritual authors, Sufis, monks, and mystics. But there is a drawbridge on this path: orthodoxy.

> On theological matters it will be hard to come to agreement. From this point of view, interreligious dialogue differs from the ecumenical dialogue among Christians which aims at bringing about a unity of faith. It is obvious that Christians and Muslims will continue to differ on essential matters of faith. (Fitzgerald 2000)

Unity of doctrinal agreement is a goal in Christian ecumenical dialogue, but there is a consensus that authentic interreligious dialogue does not aim for doctrinal unanimity:

> For this reason the purpose of theological dialogue will not be to prove that one side is right and the other wrong, but rather to explore respective positions in order to understand them better. When this is done many prejudices, built upon half-truths, will fall by the wayside. (Fitzgerald 2000)

Interreligious-theological dialogue benefits when conducted by ongoing study groups:

> Since delicate issues are involved here, it is particularly useful that they be studied by groups which have a certain stability. This allows for questions to be re-examined, looked at in new ways, with a readiness to go beyond ready-made formulas which often falsify the other's position. (Fitzgerald 2000)

General Agreement on Divine Revelation (*Wahy*), the Prophet, and the *Qur'an*

Current Situation: BAD

We have already seen how closely related the concept of revelation is to the question of the status of Muhammad as a prophet—an especially vexing question for Muslims. From those two issues, it is just a short jump to the Christian question about the status of the *Qur'an*.

We consider the current dialogue on these three issues to be in a bad situation for two reasons. First, the conceptual/linguistic conflicts cannot be reconciled without the production of a mutually-acceptable synthesis that produces a common set of beliefs. This will happen no time soon—if ever. Secondly, following Fitzgerald's conception of the purpose of interreligious dialogue as an exploration of "respective positions in order to understand them better," we assess the current situation as bad because of the very limited number of examples of Christian theologians who can articulate Islamic beliefs to the satisfaction of most Muslim theologians. Correspondingly, we see only a limited number of examples of Muslim theologians who can articulate Christian beliefs to the satisfaction of most Christian theologians.

Probability of Improvement: LOW

There are some signs of theological rapproachment in this area. For example, Hans Küng, a major Catholic theologian, has addressed the issue of Muhammad as a true prophet directly in a bold, inclusive approach:

> Might it not therefore be purely dogmatic prejudice that recognizes Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, as prophets, but not Muhammad? ...I am convinced that,

> despite all the renewed fears of Islam, there is a growing conviction among Christians that, in the light of Muhammad's place in world history, we must correct our attitude toward Islam. The "scourge of exclusiveness," arising from Christian dogmatic impatience and intolerance, condemned by the British historian Arnold Toynbee, must be abandoned. … I think for the peoples of Arabia Muhammad's prophecy led to tremendous progress. Whatever we Christians do with this fact, we must affirm that he acted as a prophet and that he was a prophet. I do not see how we can avoid the conclusion that on their way of salvation, Muslims follow a prophet who is decisive for them. (Küng 1987, 161)

Nevertheless, there appear to be many more signs of disagreement—even within the same faith community. In this regard, we note Küng's brief history of failed attempts at critical exegesis of scripture:

> Today it is important that the *Qur'an* as the word of God be seen in its historical context. Many Muslims would tell me that it is blasphemy to think that this word of God could also at the same time be the word of a human being. I would answer only in a provisional way. When the first Jew asked this about the Hebrew Bible, he was excommunicated; this was Spinoza, the seventeenth-century Jewish philosopher in Amsterdam, who started critical exegesis of the Bible. The first Catholic to raise this question was a disciple of rabbis in Paris at the time of Bossuet, also in the seventeenth century. He was exiled and had to publish his books in Amsterdam. That was Richard Simon. Thus the Catholic Church missed the chance to formulate a critical approach to the Bible as early as the seventeenth century. Reimarus, the first Protestant to propose a critical approach to scripture, also had the greatest of troubles, in Germany, and as a matter of fact did not even dare to publish his work. The great poet Lessing published it after Reimarus's death, claiming that, although it was not his own view, it was worthy of discussion. Later on, Lessing admitted that he shared Reimarus's views, and he was told not to speak of it further. …So who would be surprised if today in Islam there are similar reactions? It is dangerous to take up this matter publicly. But I know that Muslim students say in private what they will not say in public. I am accustomed to such a situation in the Catholic Church, having raised the same questions for Christians that I am proposing for my Muslim friends. (Küng 1987, 161)

General Agreement on Statements of the Unity of the Divine Principle

Current Situation: GOOD

Rowan Williams**,** the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking on the historical misperceptions and misstatements of the doctrine of the Trinity, proposes that Christians should reevaluate their thinking and language about the essential unity of the Trinity:

> The belief that God could have a son is, for the faithful Muslim, a belief suggesting that God needs something other than himself and is subject to the processes of limited bodies by 'begetting' a child. …Now these are difficult matters, and the greatest minds of the Christian Church have always found them hard to put into words. But what I wish to say to you today is simply that the disagreement between Christian and Muslim is not, I believe, a disagreement about the nature of God as One and Living and Self-subsistent. For us as for you, it is essential to think of God as a life that has no limit, as a life that is free. God is never to be listed alongside other beings. All through the centuries that we call the Middle Ages, Christians, Muslims and Jews thought alike about this, and our greatest philosophers, Thomas Aquinas, Ibn Sina, Maimonides and others, all worked to make this clear. They would all have agreed that only if God is alone and needs no other is he worthy of our complete worship and devotion. …Together we can acknowledge these things. And it is sad that sometimes an unfaithful or careless Christian way of speaking has led Muslims and Jews to believe that we have a doctrine of God that does not recognize the oneness and sufficiency of God, or that we worship something less than the One, the Eternal. In our conversations with Muslim friends, we Christians are rightly challenged to think more deeply, to think as our Egyptian Christian fathers did, about the unity of Almighty God." (Williams 2004)

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

Theologically, both Christians and Muslims agree on the unity of the divine principle. For Christians, this unity has been described as a single divine substance, one nature and three persons. Perhaps both sides could learn to talk in a new way about the divine mathematics. Hans Küng hints at the possibility of the need for devising a new conceptual framework:

> …Why distinguish at all between nature and person in God? It is obvious that the *distinctions* between one and three made by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity do not satisfy Muslims. All these concepts of Syrian, Greek, and Latin origin are more confusing to them than enlightening, a game of words and concepts. How can the one and only God, asks the Muslim, be a conglomeration of hypostases, persons, processions, and relations? Why all the dialectical tricks! Is not God simply God, "combined" neither in this way nor that?" (Küng 1987, 161)

We see a strong likelihood of forward movement in this particular doctrinal area because of the desirability of adapting our linguistic structures to accentuate points of basic religious agreement.

General Agreement on Salvation (*falaah*), Divine Law (*Shari'ah*), and Jerusalem

Current Situation: BAD

The dialogic situation for questions on salvation, Divine Law, and Jerusalem are similar to the situation for the questions about divine revelation (*Wahy*), the Prophet, and the *Qur'an.* But in these areas, the conceptual fissures are so deep that they are discernable in the flux of daily world events. Religious extremism especially thrives in theologically simple realms of only black and white:

> It is futile to enter into dialogue between two parties where each party believes that only they will inherit paradise, and where the other ends up in hell. (Nasr 1998, 7)

Again, there seem to be two reasons for our pessimism. First, the conceptual/linguistic conflicts cannot be reconciled without a new synthesis of common beliefs—very unlikely by everyone's estimate. Secondly, there are only a few examples of Christian and Muslim theologians who can articulate each other's beliefs in these areas to their mutual satisfaction.

Probability of Improvement: LOW

Let's focus in one area: the meaning of salvation and the questions of who is saved and how are they saved— major doctrinal stumbling blocks. There is certainly no agreement among Christian theologians about how best to talk about salvation. In Table 12, consider Fitzgerald's and Machado's outline of the recent history of the Christian theological discussion of the concept of salvation, noting the three distinct approaches (Fitzgerald and Machado 2003):

Table 12. Christian Salvation Theories
Fitzgerald and Machado

Inclusivist approach: Christ (not Christianity) is seen as the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets in Judaism. Christ's relationship to other religions is one of fulfillment.	▪ In a seminal stage in the writings of some French and Belgian Catholics in India in the first half of the 20th century. ▪ This approach is becoming popular within Protestant circles. ▪ Putting emphasis on the path of dialogue, some Protestant theologians, such as J A T Robinson, not only see other religions finding fulfillment in Christ but also think that Christianity itself is fulfilled in its encounter with other religions. ▪ Current theologians in this camp: J Danielou, H de Lubac, Karl Rahner, H U von Balthazar, Y M Congar, and E Schillebeeckx.
Pluralist approach: argues that Christianity cannot claim any special status among the world religions, but should be seen as just one among many equally salvific paths. Christ's relationship to other religions is one of mutual appreciation.	▪ Pursued by some Protestant theologians, such as John Hick and W C Smith. These, however, are criticized for their allegedly vague and obscure understanding of God and their relativising of religious truth. ▪ A small number of influential American Catholics have adopted a Hickian form of pluralism. Paul Knitter, Rosemary Reuther, Gregory Baum and Leonard Swidler have kept the discussion going.
Exclusivist approach: criticizes both Inclusivism and Pluralism and stresses Christ's relationship to other religions as one of discontinuity and judgment.	▪ Dominated the Missionary Congress of 1910 and also the World council of Churches under the directorship of W Visser't Hooft until his retirement in 1966. ▪ By and large the exclusivist approach prevailed among Catholic thinkers until Vatican II's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965). ▪ Some Protestant Exclusivists are criticized for their rigid interpretation of biblical authority, minimizing revelation outside Christianity and, in some cases, for their triumphalism and even racism.

Because Muslim theology includes a place for the "People of the Book," most, if not all, Muslim theologians would be classed as Islamic Inclusivists. So, this is a particular problem for Christians. Their internal dialogue on this issue continues, and in fact, the current Pope weighed in on the issue shortly before his election in his statements on the problem of relativism. Despite this continuing—primarily Christian—debate, there is a glimmer of hope in the theological dimension:

> …according to Vatican II, even Muslims need not "perish in that eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"—they can "achieve eternal salvation." That means that Islam, too, can be a way of salvation. (Küng 1987, 161)

Another doctrinal conflict area is the issue of Divine Law and questions about whether and how that law relates to human/political law. Nasr indicates the importance of this area in noting that "The development of necessary mutual respect must include reaching certain accords about the relationship between Divine Law and secular law." (Nasr 1998, 8-9) And for some, the debate about the nature and desirability of *Shari'ah* relates directly to the squishy issue of Western secularization:

> Some Muslims believe that Christ's admonishment to "give unto Caesar what is Caesar's" has marginalized the significance of religion in human affairs—leading finally to the secularization of the West. (Nasr 1998, 9)

In this area of disagreement, Muslims may be facing other cultural frictions besides the ideological tensions and distortions of *Shari'ah* fostered by Islamic extremists:

> The association of Islam with rule is, therefore, more than quasi-theological. It is semi-theological. Outstanding theologians have come up with reinterpretations allowing for an Islam shorn of political power and yet secure and sovereign, a complete code of life, perhaps more cogently than the Islamists with their disfiguring of Islam as a political ideology. Nonetheless, such intellectualist reinterpretations rarely catch on with the masses. As a community, Muslims are burdened with the triumphalist legacy of an imperial past, making it difficult for them to integrate into a pluralist society where all are equal partners and no single community rules supreme. (Duran 1990)

Until Ustadh Mahmud's Islamic reform methodology, or some similar approach, is followed universally, there do not appear to be any hopeful signs for near-term progress on the issue of *Shari'ah.* Abdullahi An-Na'im discusses the thinking of the Muslim thinker, Ustadh Mahmud in relation to this issue:

> …we emphasize the importance of his contribution to the relations [between] Muslims and non-Muslims. As clearly shown above, *shari'a* is inconsistent with the fundamental constitutional and human rights of non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state. Consequently, on the one hand, Islamization through the application of *shari'a* would be disastrous for these citizens. It is largely in rejection of the implications of being non-Muslim citizens under *shari'a* that Sudanese non-Muslims have resorted to armed rebellion since 1983. …Without an Islamic reform methodology that is capable of reconciling the legitimate demands and expectations of both segments of the population, violent confrontation is clearly unavoidable. The only possible outcome such a

> confrontation is to force one segment of the population to abandon its current position, which is unlikely except as a temporary solution. The Islamic reform methodology proposed by Ustadh Mahmud would achieve complete reconciliation between the two positions and, thereby, provide lasting solution. Under his approach, Muslims would be able to live under a constitutional and legal system derived from the permanent and fundament principles of Islam without violating the constitutional and human rights of non-Muslims. (An-Na'im 1988)

The problems posed by salavtion-related and *Shari'ah*-related issues are also compounded by the continuing disagreements and serious conflicts over the destiny of Jerusalem and the whole Middle East. So, our assessment of this cluster of doctrines is necessarily pessimistic—no proximate, substantial improvements can be realistically predicted.

General Agreement on Evangelization (*Da'wah*)

Current Situation: BAD

Why do multiple, exclusivist salvation narratives exist in the first place? Until a theology of religions can offer a cogent and widely-accepted answer to this question, it seems that it will persist. Indeed, from the exclusivist viewpoint, there is little incentive to even attempt to answer this question. Post-Vatican II Christians do not see that the guiding purpose of their evangelization efforts needs to be reinterpreted in view of *Nostra Aetate's* call to interreligious dialogue. Here is Cardinal Arinze speaking on how interreligious dialogue is integral with the Church's evangelization efforts:

> The necessity to show the clear relation between dialogue and proclamation has been felt ever since the publication of *Nostra aetate*. In this context, *Dialogue and Proclamation* has become a reference point for those who wish to go deeper into this argument. The Holy Father wrote in *Redemptoris Missio*: "Interreligious 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." (Machado 2001).

Nor is there any apparent movement in Muslim theological circles toward re-purposing of Islam's missionary work (*da'wah*). On both sides, strong evangelical forces of righteousness are in play.

> There is yet another domain in which incomprehension is almost total, though it involves the highest forms of charity and of mutual aid. Christians and Muslims throughout the world are far from respecting one another when they dedicate themselves to the aid of disinherited populations; work to educate new generations in the schools, colleges, and universities; or serve the sick and dying in hospitals and dispensaries. Very quickly, the most violent accusations of treacherous proselytism are exchanged and amplified instead of concentrating on healthy religious "competition" in the realm of respect of persons and societies. The duty of the apostolate as conceived by one or the other religion is often expressed by strife and the expending of energy in which the glory of God is no longer assured." (Lanfry 1977)

Moreover, for both Christians and Muslims, the world's current events cannot be realistically interpreted as credible witness of the truth of the other's religious values or beliefs.

> In his many spiritual writings, Charles de Foucauld described the character and the purpose of his presence in the desert, living among a non-Christian majority. 'My evangelization must be an evangelization of goodness. Seeing me, they should say: "since this man is so good, his religion must be good."' (Bonny 2001)

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

Past and current conditions in this area notwithstanding, the prospects for increasing clarification of Christian proselytism versus evangelization are fairly good. The urgent need for more cooperation between Christians and Muslims at all levels of society is a sufficiently strong motivator for reaching better agreement in this area. Additionally, religious leaders know that if they cannot be instrumental in the elimination of conflict and the creation of interreligious harmony in our times, the credibility of all organized religions will be in dire jepordy. In a note that accompanied the Vatican's annual message to Muslims at the end of Ramadan in 2006, Cardinal Paul Poupard, president of Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, said:

> The particular circumstances that we have recently experienced together demonstrate clearly that, however arduous the path of authentic dialogue may be at times,

> it is more necessary than ever. …While contemplating and thanking God for all that is good, it is impossible not to take note of the serious problems which affect our times: injustice, poverty, tensions and conflicts between countries as well as within them. Violence and terrorism are particularly painful scourges. …Without a doubt, the credibility of religions and also the credibility of our religious leaders and all believers is at stake. If we do not play our part as believers, many will question the usefulness of religion and the integrity of all men and women who bow down before God. (Zenit 2006j)

As one example of definite progress, the PCID is currently attempting to create "a code of conduct" for Christian churches to follow when spreading the Gospel to people of other faiths.

Developing a Cogent Theology of Religions

Current Situation: BAD

The development of a theology of religions that accommodates and supports dialogue about all the world's major religious stories is not a goal that everyone will agree is either desirable or achievable. And although there is a growing body of theological literature in this area, we are unaware of any current approach that has broad acceptance. The polarizing role of distinct religious identities in the world today is still too strongly enmeshed with cultural, ethnic, sectarian and other group goals for any *metanoia* by most belief groups. Also, absolutist, doctrinally-rigid views show no signs of abating soon on either side of the dialogic divide. These types of views are not conducive to fostering genuine dialogue that attempts to truly listen to and understand the other.

> The possibility for genuine dialogue depends on a series of conditions that, on the whole, may conflict with the current self-understanding of many religious traditions. Dialogue, first of all, requires an attitude of epistemic humility about one's own understanding of the truth and openness to the possibility of change and growth. (Cornille 2006)

All current attitudes considered, the current climate appears to be inhospitable for any significant progress in this area.

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

There are strong reasons for believing that a cogent theology of religions will begin to evolve in this century. First, in a globally-linked, manifestly pluralistic, and interdependent world, reason impels the development of a theology of religions:

> Islam and Christianity cannot therefore be impervious to each other's claims, for just as it is irrefutably true that each lays claim to *the* truth and does so candidly, it is irrefutably true that the truth is one, that unless the standpoint is one of skepticism, of two diverse claims to *the* truth, one or both must be false! In the awareness that the standpoint of religion is that of a claim to *the* truth, none but the most egotistic tribalism or cynicism would sit content with its grasp of *the* truth while diverse claims to *the* one and the same truth are being made just as candidly by others. (Al Faruqi 1968)

Secondly, the development of a theology of religions seems to be required for conducting effective dialogues about evangelization agreements. Speaking on the *Promotion of Missiological Studies in Seminaries*, Cardinal Francis George explains this necessary linkage:

> But as the century ends, we are still faced with seeking a deeper understanding of the forms of dialogue, and especially their implications for a theology of religions. The question of the theology of religions continues to be one of the most neuralgic that Catholic missiology faces: just how do we assess the meaning of other religions vis-à-vis Christianity? What role do they play in God's plan for human salvation? As the world grows smaller, and interaction between the religions is not always peaceful (think of the recent church burnings in Indonesia and India), how are we to assess the encounter of religions? The Council and subsequent papal teaching have framed the question partially: God is somehow active in these traditions without their being formally part of divine revelation. But the complete working out of the relation remains still before us. (George 2004)

Thirdly, our high hopes for improvement in this area are bolstered by the slow accumulation of philosophical and theological research in this area:

> … the theme of the theology of religions has been enriched by the contribution of theologians such as J Danielou, H de Lubac, Karl Rahner, H U von Balthazar, Y M Congar and E Schillebeeckx. It is the inclusivist approach which these theologians adopt, with naturally a number of variations, to understand the presence of other religious traditions in the plan of God to save all people. A small number of influential American Catholics have adopted a Hickian form of pluralism. (Fitzgerald and Machado 2003)

Again, Fitzgerald and Machado:

> Can there really exist a theology of religions which is acceptable to all? Is a universal theology of religions possible? The Catholic Church's approach to the theology of religions is one of great caution for the `theology of religions does not yet have a clearly defined epistemological status'. The document [*Nostra Aetate*]explains further that `if theology is Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum* it is not clear how one can abandon the `dogmatic principle' or reflect theologically, if one dispenses with one's own `resources of truth'. …Some attempts within Christian circles to develop a Christian theology of religious pluralism have been made, although none of them can be said to be complete and definitive. (Fitzgerald and Machado 2003)

Additionally, we note the continuing dialogue of groups like the Snowmass Conference. Organized by Abbot Thomas Keating, the Snowmass Conference was composed of fifteen religions—each represented by one person. After meeting for nearly ten years, the fifteen spiritual leaders arrived at a consensus on basic principles, or "Guidelines for Interreligious Understanding." (Teasdal 1991) Thomas Keating outlines these noteworthy guidelines in *Speaking of Silence* (see Table 13).

Table 13. Guidelines for Interreligious Understanding
Thomas Keating - Snowmass Conf.

1. The world religions bear witness to the experience of the Ultimate Reality to which they give various names: Brahman, the Absolute, God, Allah, (the) Great Spirit, the Transcendent.
2. The Ultimate Reality surpasses any name or concept that can be given to It.
3. The Ultimate Reality is the source (ground of being) of all existence.
4. Faith is opening, surrendering, and responding to the Ultimate Reality. This relationship precedes every belief system.
5. The potential for human wholeness—or in other frames of reference, liberation, self-transcendence, enlightenment, salvation, transforming union, *moksha, nirvana, fana*—is present in every human person.
6. The Ultimate Reality may be experienced not only through religious practices but also through nature, art, human relationships and service to others.

Conditions for More Effective Interreligious-*Existential* Dialogue

Beyond the theological dimension of interreligious dialogue, there is the much larger arena dominated by the dialogues of power and pragmatism. In this space, the fine points of

theological speculation are pushed aside by the press of historical events, existential concerns, and common needs. In this arena, we can locate many of Cardinal Francis Arinze's 1998 recommendations for meeting the challenges of Christian-Muslim dialogue—here summarized in Table 14.

Table 14. Meeting the Challenges of Dialogue
Cardinal Francis Arinze

1. Healing of Historical Memories (see Table 8 #1) The history of Muslim-Christian relations should be studied in all sincerity and truth. Past wrongs should be accepted and regretted. Pardon should be sought and given.
2. Learning to Exercise Self-criticism (see Table 8 #2) The difficult exercise has to be learned. Pope John Paul II called the Catholic Church to reflect on the Church's failings over the past millennium in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*.
3. Liberating Religion from Political Manipulation (see Table 8 #3) Politians and governments should be impartial towards all religions. Religious leaders who allow their religion to be used as a political instrument will face difficulties.It will be useful for religious and political leaders to meet and discuss.
4. Addressing Religious Extremism and Promoting Religious Freedom (see Table 8 #4-6) Muslims and Christians have no choice but to accept that we are in a world in which religious plurality is a fact. Religion is something proposed—not imposed. Freedom of religion is one of the dearest of human rights and no one should be prevented from exercising this right—provided the rights of other people are not violated.
5. Promotion of Development and Justice Poverty, underdevelopment, justice, and corruption are fertile ground for the rise or growth of extremist religious tendencies. The effective response to religious extremists is a commitment from Christians, Muslims, and other citizens to justice, development, and sound economic programs.
6. More Attention to the Spiritual Dimension Both sides should commit themselves to deeper spiritualities in attention to God. A Christian leader and a Muslim leader who are gifted with high-voltage spirituality are more likely to understand each other and promote good relations, than two learned people from the two religions who practice little of what they preach.
7. Joint Concern Over the Use of the Earth's Resources About 20% of humanity consumes about 80% of the earth's resources. The world's resources can be devastated or slowly depleted by greed, carelessness and war. Our interdependent global environment is a rich area for Christian-Muslim

collaboration.

As noted in the table above, several of Arinze's recommendations correspond with his list of dialogic obstacles (Table 8 above). It is also worth noting that all but possibly one (#4), of his recommendations relate to the interreligious-*existential* arena—the PCID's dialogues of life and deeds.

Evidence to substantiate our assessments in this area is more ambiguous and multi-form than in the preceeding evaluation of theological conditions. In the interreligious-*existential* mode, our interpretations of events and conditions are more vulnerable to media distortions, and our assessments of probabilities of positive changes are less confident in the face of the continuously-changing, multi-dimensional complexities. So the review and assessment of the five "existential conditions" below can be nothing more than cursory.

Rethinking Civilizational Friction Dynamics

Current Situation: BAD

Whether or not Huntington is essentially correct in his thesis, it is still fairly obvious that both the Christians' and Muslims' absolutist views of the truth of their revealed faiths are major factors in the perpetuation of misunderstanding, suspicion, and distrust.

> In Islam as well as in Christianity, and probably in all other religions, the man of religion does not, in his religious claim, assert a tentative hypothesis, nor *a* truth among other truths, or a version of the truth among other possible versions, but *the* truth. This is so much part of religious experience and of the claim resting on such experience that to deny it is to caricature the religion as a whole. Neither Islam nor Christianity can or will ever give it up. Certainly this is exclusivism; but *the* truth is exclusive. It cannot run counter to the laws of identity, of contradiction, of the excluded middle. Unlike science which works with probabilities, religion works with certainties. Religious diversity is not merely a religious problem. If the religion in question lays claim to *the* truth, contrary or diverse claims are intellectual problems which cannot be ignored. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the exclusivist claim is as much *de jure* as it is *de facto*. (Al Faruqi 1968)

Whether or not Huntington's thesis is misguided, it is still obvious that absolutist, doctrinally-rigid views of "revealed truths" will continue to be very serious impediments to the development of mutual understanding and respect—essential for the success of even the most basic and pragmatic dialogues.

There is considerable evidence of a growing awareness of the historical problems of cultural stereotyping that can be both aggrevated and ameliorated by the mass media. Cases in point:

> "Islamo-fascism" should be jettisoned from Bush's vocabulary. It yokes the faith of a billion people with an odious ideology. Imagine how Christians would have reacted, had FDR taken to declaring Franco's Spain and Mussolini's Italy "Christo-fascist." (Buchanan 2006b)

> Mohammad Khatami was the most anticipated speaker at the convention (Islamic Society of North America convention in Chicago) and his speech was surprisingly direct. Within minutes of taking the podium he was attacking the portrayal of Islam in the popular media in the West. "Media Islam is the result of a one-sided understanding of Islam that is represented to us in a solitary, cliched and vicious way," he said. "The political version of Islam that is displayed is merely an imaginary version of Islam. What has been stated is a dark and false perception of Islam and the East." (Brimacombe 2006)

Absolutist, doctrinally-rigid views tend to support the perpetuation of sterotypes and other narratives that distort or slant dialogue. The current climate is bad for any significant progress in this area.

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

It is completely conceivable that the reformulation of absolutist, doctrinally-rigid views is a condition for the possibility of developing and enriching a healthy religious identity. Here is Emilia Guarnieri, president of the Association of the Meeting for Friendship among Peoples, in an interview that discussed a large 2006 intercultural meeting in Rimini, Italy:

> Q: Never before as in this edition has the need been aroused to discover, further and reinforce the Christian identity. Many figures of secular culture, without Catholic formation, addressed the meeting, speaking about the Christian roots of European culture.
>
> Guarnieri: It's true. On the other hand, we have always maintained that dialogue and coexistence are not the result of watering down identity, but that a strong identity, based on what one believes, on what is lived as experience, allows one to converse and relate to others. In the world in which we live, relativism, nihilism, secularism and fears are leading to a worsening of life. What, then, can one oppose to nihilism, cynicism and skepticism? Only identity, there is no other. It is inevitable. (Zenit 2006h)

Is it possible that attempts at interreligious dialogue may be less fruitful—less productive in achieving common goals—than philosophical and cultural dialogues? In his analysis of the contributions of the Moroccan philosopher Muḥammad ʻĀbid al-Jābirī, Ibrahim Abu-Rabī notes:

> Jābirī thus follows a double process: a deconstruction of the past and a reexamination of the most pressing issues facing post-colonial Arab thought. Unlike Abdullah Laroui., Jābirī does not dismiss Islamic philosophical and religious tradition; neither does he espouse a wholesale acceptance of any form of European school of thought or philosophy. …Although he does not directly condemn theology, his identification of Arab renaissance with philosophy, especially critical philosophy, casts doubt on the usefulness of theology as an intellectual medium in contemporary Arab culture. Jābirī believes that philosophy can free contemporary Arab culture from the parochialism of the theological mind (that is, *Salafī* mind) and distance it from those theological presuppositions that belong to a bygone era. (Abu-Rabī 2003)

And from a Christian observer:

> Typically, in the West, at least, Christian-Muslim relations involves a Christian West and a Muslim East, a secularised West and a conservative East, a tolerant West and an extremist East. Of course, these perceptions are erroneous. It is also erroneous to perceive Christian-Muslim relations in terms of theological dialogue only. In pluralistic societies today elements of these erroneous perceptions are found in both religions. In order to counter them, we need to explore new patterns of relations, methodologies and style of dialogue. We must restate our priorities and include all segments of society in our dialogue. Our dialogue must not be an end in itself; it must be oriented towards promoting common values and exploring common ways of working together and living together as one community. Therefore, our dialogue must be existential in its nature, realistic in its approach, and contextual in its agenda. (Aram 1 2002)

There is increasing discourse related to rethinking the concept of group identity—within both the Christian and Muslim "civilizations." This is good evidence for believing that intercultural and interreligious dialogue dynamics will continue to improve for some time.

Revising Our Understanding of Relativism and the Encounter of Cultures

Current Situation: BAD

It seems that most Christians are generally inclined to give preferential treatment to their estimations of Western culture. The conception of an encounter with another culture like Islam either never emerges in consciousness—either imaginatively or otherwise—or is rejected as pointless, alien, wrong, dangerous, and so forth. Related to the human proclivity to assign preferential status to our own *Weltanschauungs* is the issue of relativism. Here we go 'round the Mulberry bush: (1) We assign priority to our culture's truths because we believe that our way is the right way; (2) We know our way is the right way because some truths are absolute—unchanging over time and any existential situation; (3) Return to (1). Speaking on the theological relativism (Pluralism), of John Hick, Cardinal Ratzinger says:

> …the notion of "dialogue"—which has maintained a position of significant importance in the Platonic and Christian tradition—changes meaning and becomes both the quintessence of the relativist creed and the antithesis of conversion and the mission. In the relativist meaning, "to dialogue" means to put one's own position, i.e., one's faith, on the same level as the convictions of others without recognizing in principle more truth in it than that which is attributed to the opinion of the others. Only if I suppose in principle that the other can be as right, or more right than I, can an authentic dialogue take place. …According to this concept, dialogue must be an exchange between positions which have fundamentally the same rank and therefore are mutually relative. Only in this way will the maximum cooperation and integration between the different religions be achieved. The relativist dissolution of Christology, and even more of ecclesiology, thus becomes a central commandment of religion. To return to Hick's thinking, faith in the divinity of one concrete person, as he tells us, leads to fanaticism and particularism, to the dissociation between faith and love, and it is precisely this which must be overcome. (Ratzinger 2002)

The tone and style of scholastic disputation is evident even in this brief excerpt from extensive statements and arguments made by Cardinal Ratzinger (a "moderate inclusivist" soon to become Pope Benedict XVI), on the issue of relativism (pluralism). This mode of reasoning struggles with questions about the validity of its own assumptions and conceptual frameworks, and is not inclined to seek common or middle ground. In today's world, exclusivist and exclutionary narratives are still the norm—especially in religious/theological discourses and texts.

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

What is the epistemological status of religious belief assertions? The debate rages, confined by the currently dominant categories of thinking—often simple either/or disjunctives. In the prevailing view of orthodoxy, there can be only one common truth and (praise the Lord or Allah), we have most of it.

In spite of this context of rectitude, there is good reason to believe that cultural encounters between Christians and Muslims will continue, expand, and deepen over time. Unlike the world of the Middle Ages, today's world is interconnected in many new ways. In theological dialogue and debates on ethics, absolutist positions may still be tolerable. But within the over-arching cultural dialogues of education, politics, economics, and other engagements of daily life, the only normative absolutes relate to orthopraxis—not orthodoxy. The absolute need for peaceful co-existence will promote pragmatic dialogues that circumvent the current epistemological mire.

> … isolation is impossible. The world is simply too small, and our lives are utterly interdependent. Not only our survival, but even our well-being and happiness depend on our cooperation. Mere diplomatic courtesy or casual coalescence of political interests will not suffice. (Al Faruqi 1968)

In practice, what works in the promotion of peace will be seen to be true. The credibility of all the world's major religious belief systems is on the line here.

Planning and Supporting Social, Political, and Economic Improvements

Current Situation: BAD

The current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, plus Western military interventions in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, is producing growing resentment and mistrust between Christian and Muslim communities. The continuing acts of extremists are horrific. And as a shabby backdrop to all this armed conflict, we see extensive examples of drought, disease, hungar, poverty, hungar, "ethnic cleansing," displacement of persons, and other imbalances in our fragile global village.

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

For the creation and maintenance of global security and reform, failure to to build bridges between groups in conflict is not an option. Not surprisingly then, more and more voices of reason and prudence are saying that a horrendous clash of civilisations can still be avoided:

> A cross-cultural group of 20 prominent world figures has called for urgent efforts to heal the growing divide between Muslim and Western societies. The chief causes of the rift are not religion or history, they say, but recent political developments, notably the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their findings were presented to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at a ceremony in Istanbul on Monday. … "We may wish to think of the Arab - Israeli conflict as just one regional conflict among many. But it is not," Mr Annan said. "As long as the Palestinians live under occupation, exposed to daily frustration and humiliation, and as long as Israelis are blown up in buses and in dances halls, so long will passions everywhere be inflamed." The Alliance of Civilisations, which includes Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, dismisses the notion that a clash of civilisations is inevitable, but says that swift action is needed. The group argues that the need to build bridges between Muslim and Western societies has never been greater. (BBC News 2006e)

Many Christians and Muslims recognize the need to take practical steps to cooperate in areas of common concern, in this regard, the pragmatic dialogical recommendations of the World Council of Churches (WCC) should be considered carefully. In *Christians Meeting Muslims: WCC Papers on Ten Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (1977), the WCC identified four specific needs for more study—based on the belief that "theological and spiritual renewal can prepare us for social renewal." Table 15 offers a summary (Renard 1992) of these four dialogical needs:

Table 15. Critical Dialogical Needs Today
World Council of Churches

1. Achievement of a wider vision of world community as interracial, intercultural, and international, for example, would involve Muslims and Christians together in seeking justice for the Palestinians.
2. Reconsideration of notions of revelation "may help us to be more faithful to our own tradition as well as being more appreciative and coherent with our neighbor."
3. A variety of political and cultural contexts must be seen as viable possibilities for interaction-that is, not merely either a secular state or a religious state.
4. Since dialogue is listening to God as well as to one another, the "spiritual basis and eschatological dimension of worship and prayer" must be seen as essential to dialogue. In other words, Muslims and Christians need to talk about how they relate their spiritual lives to demands for "justice, brotherhood, and human dignity."

There is a growing awareness, among common persons as well as professional observers, that today's world of interlinking interdependencies requires that we forge better mechanisms for promoting the global common good.

> One of the great discoveries of the twentieth century has been the insight of the essential interdependence of nations, cultures and groups. This interdependence is well-known in economics, politics and social life, but it exists even between and among the religions. The concrete experience of this interdependence is being advanced more and more in our time through various forms of contact, exchange, and exploration among the representatives of the various traditions. The church has taken the lead in opening up to the other systems of faith, encouraging regular and systematic relationships. The fruits of these encounters are becoming evident: a genuine respect for the moral, spiritual and psychological values present in each tradition, a search for common ground, and a sense

> of universal responsibility for the planet as a whole in-all of its dimensions of need. One result is a commitment to collaborate for the promotion of world peace and a new vision of society and humankind. (Teasdal 1991)

And there are other signs that interreligious dialogue is expanding into non-theological territory. For instance, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, until recently the Vatican's chief official in charge of interfaith dialogue, was named by the Pope as apostolic nuncio to Egypt and the Cairo-based Arab League:

> The mild-mannered English archbishop is a notable expert on Islam and has a fluent command of Arabic, so will be well placed in Cairo to keep abreast of events in the turbulent Middle East. (Mickens and Hirst 2006)

Although some commentators have interpreted Fitzgerald's departure from Rome as a demotion, this move can also be seen as a strategy to directly engage Muslims at a diplomatic/political level.

> Dr Justo Lacunza Balda, director of the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, told *The Tablet* "Egypt plays a major role in the Islamic world. Archbishop Michael has all the necessary requisities to be not only the representative of the Holy See but also representative of Catholic attitudes towards Muslims." (Mickens and Hirst 2006)

> But while there is speculation that Pope Benedict may be looking for changes in the Church's approach to Islam, it should not be assumed that the English archbishop has been sidelined. "Fitzgerald is not being sent out to pasture," insists the National Catholic Reporter's John Allen. "Cairo is home to the Al-Azhar University and Mosque, arguably the closest thing in the Muslim world to a Vatican, and hence Fitzgerald will remain a privileged interlocutor with Islam. "In fact, one could make the argument that his skills will be better utilized in Egypt than they were at the Vatican, where much of his work was ceremonial and administrative." (Gould 2006)

We expect to see more "existential" dialogic engagements like this in the future.

Understanding Theology as Dialogue

Current Situation: BAD

If Al Faruqi's view of dialogue as "of the essence" of Islam and Christianity is true, then it makes sense to speak of theology as the "science of dialogue." As a particular branch of human

knowledge, theology, literally "the science of God," is clearly not a "science" as that term is now understood in ordinary language. Today, the major theologies of the current world present themselves as systematic explanations and interpretations of "revealed" truths—stories that are linked inextricably with the separate cultures and philosophies of their origins. All the world's major religions have theologies that seek to establish effective frameworks for discourse about the ineffable.

But for a future characterized by more effective interreligious dialogue, perhaps it will be necessary to devise new stories about the nature of theology itself. Perhaps theologies will need to create a common meeting ground where they view themselves and the others as equal partners in a common quest for human spiritual fulfillment.

From their beginning as a distinct belief system, to the onset of the Protestant Reformation, Christians have generally viewed reason as useful for explaining and defending their belief claims. Particularly in the West, and especially after Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic Church viewed philosophy as the "handmaiden of theology." In certain ways, many early Protestants repudiated this view of the relation between reason and faith; reason was seen as grossly inadequate as a reliable guide on the path of faith. But now, in these latter days, we see a renewed interest in the importance of philosophy in the service of theology studies. Today, among Christians—even among fundamentalist and evangelical Protestant groups—there is broad agreement that the tools and methods of human reason are useful, indeed required, for theological methods of inquiry.

On the Muslim side, there is a very different, diffused general perception of the relation between reason and faith. Instead of the *Logos* of Christianity, Islam epitomizes its story in the Will of Allah. For most Muslims, the principles and methods of human reason are completely

subordinated to whatever principles or methods Allah might ordain. For many Muslim theologians, reason is not as dependable a partner on the path of faith as it is for the Christians. This divergent view of the faith-reason relationship creates a fundamental fault line in their dialogic process. How deeply this structural rift extends is not yet clear. If it cannot be closed through continuing dialogue, the failure will be seen as a failure of religion as a force for unity in the world.

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

The urgency of the need for dialogue instead of violence, and for more effective dialogues in the future, cannot be overstated. Hence, the time is now for Christian and Muslim theologians, indeed all theologians, to construct new dialogues for exploring their common ground and planting common gardens. There is good reason to hope for the swift development of a new theology of religions. High-speed communications, and Internet tools and resources are now at the disposal of all scholars. All interlocutors can be quickly linked—no matter where they are in the world. Tools like email, blogs, streaming media, and the World Wide Web offer new channels for transferring information and conducting real-time, online discussions.

A true commitment to interreligious dialogue opens up a new understanding of theology and the relationship between scriptural texts and reason-derived texts:

> The "Universal Declaration on Non-Violence" was formulated and endorsed by the North American Board for East-West Dialogue, a monastic organization dedicated to interreligious understanding, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama in October 1990. This could become part of the foundation of a new vision of global society and culture. The Universal Declaration could be an essential principle in promoting a worldwide or universal understanding of society and its relation to the natural environment. The ideals of non-violence and gentleness are indispensable to this possibility of a new civilization rooted in love and compassion, a civilization that places the ultimate emphasis on the values of spiritual transformation. (Teasdal 1991)

Theology seeks to establish effective frameworks for discourse about the ineffable. Especially in the Western Christian tradition, the dominant framework has been a rational discourse model—most notably the Scholastic methods of disputation and the formation of conceptual distinctions according to the Aristotlean mechanics of abstraction. But, especially in view of the continuing successes of the scientific method and other methods of rational discovery, it is obvious that this framework is not the only credible option. Inevitably, theologians will undertake new dialogues that circumvent the logic imposed by the inclusivist-exclusivist framework. Dialogues under the canopy of exclusivism are increasingly untenable in an interconnected world. And dialogues under the canopy of inclusivism face similar difficulties.

We all agree on a new meaning for the word "planet" and suddenly there are now only eight planets—only yesterday there were nine. Suddenly, we find ourselves at a juncture for how we continue to talk with each other. In a similar conversion, it is to be expected that a true, ongoing commitment to interreligious dialogue will open up a new understanding of theology:

> Today, we speak of multiple theologies (Christian: Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, etc.; Jewish: Orthodox, Reformed, etc.; and Muslim: Shia, Sunni, Sufi). But if theology is to be truly the "science of God," and if there really is only one God, then it follows that there can be only one theology. (Martino 2006)

Attending More to the Spiritual Dimension

Current Situation: BAD

Beyond religious concepts and categories, beyond the languages and logics, there is an ineffable reality to which they all incline. Spirituality transcends religious and theological discourse and directly confronts the "madness of God." In our world today, to move past our parochical world views and their attendant discourses, we will need to, somehow, give more attention to the spiritual dimension. This is a dialogic need that Cardinal Arinze cites (see Table 8 #6 above):

> Christian-Muslim relations will make more progress in the 21st century if there is increased attention on both sides to the spiritual dimension. Knowledge of the other religion, religious freedom, meetings and common projects are good and important—but not enough. Greater attention to God is necessary. (Arinze 1998, 15-16)

Pope John Paul II posits that the Church's continuing quest for the truth is essentially guided, not by human reason, but by God:

> We know in fact that, in the presence of the mystery of grace, infinitely full of possibilities and implications for human life and history, the Church herself will never cease putting questions, trusting in the help of the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 14:17), whose task it is to guide her "into all the truth" (Jn 16:13)." (John Paul II 2000)

But despite our assertions of trust in divine guidance, humans are still manifestly entangled in webs of misunderstanding, confusion, prejudice, and fear.

> Beyond a purely intellectual and historical understanding of the other, dialogue also presupposes a certain capacity for empathy, an ability to relate to and gauge the spiritual meaning and depth of particular beliefs and practices. In addition to postmodern critiques of the possibility of understanding the other from within, religions are also generally suspicious of or reticent about the level of religious immersion and identification with the other that is necessary for such understanding. Finally, genuine dialogue presupposes recognition of the possibility of discovering truth in the other religion. Though few religions would deny the possible existence of truth beyond the confines of one's own tradition, such truth is generally considered to be dependent on and reducible to the teachings and practices already at hand. As such, dialogue is often regarded as superfluous. (Cornille 2006)

Can there be any doubt that today we are still at a far remove from the God we all seek?

Probability of Improvement: HIGH

On the level at which solutions are currently sought by theologians, it will be impossible to reach accord without doctrinal distortion. In the formal view, adherence to creed supercedes any commitment to, or method of interreligious dialogue. The most that can be expected is mutual respect and an acknowledgement that full accord can only be possible on a metaphysical and esoteric level. For example, on the esoteric level, a melding of Christian mysticism and Sufism may offer a path around the considerable, formal theological obstacles.

> On this level, the truths of these two religions "reside in harmony which transcends all tensions that lie in the realm of differentiation below the state of principial Unity." (Nasr 1998, 5)

Referring to the innovative Muslim thinker Shaykh Habashi, A. Nizar Hamzeh and R. Hrair Dekmejian note:

> Consistent with his Sufi beliefs, Habashi extolls *al- rahbaniyya*—the fraternity of mystics—as "a virtuous way" that is also practiced by the monastic "followers of Christ." (Hamzeh 1996)

Christian monastics and Sufis have already conducted some meetings. A 2005 news report (*Christian-Muslim dialogue: meeting with Sufis again*), from the Committees for Monastic Interreligious Dialogue is a case in point:

> Our group met again with the Sufis of the brotherhood Alawiya. The meeting took place at the Bernardine Monastery of Collombey, Valais. During a previous encounter, the Sufis spoke about the five pillars of the Islam, which are, so to speak, the fundaments of their religion. This time, it was our turn to witness our faith and we focused our reflection on the Prayer of the Name. The Lord's Prayer…The exchange that followed focused on the sense of how our respective religions harmonize. (Committees for Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. 2005)

We can envision a new path for Christian-Muslim dialogue that is blazed by Christian monastics and Sufis—a path that circumvents the tortured routes of doctrinaire dialogue:

> On the mystical level, the religions have much to share, whereas on the scholarly level, words can and do get in the way of this kind of deeper communication. It is important to be clear here: The academic type of dialogue is greatly needed, but it must defer to the mystical reality at the core of each tradition. (Teasdal 1991)

Assessing the Current Conditions for Improving Christian-Muslim Dialogue

We can now summarize our foregoing assessments:

Specific Necessary Conditions	Current Situation		Probability of Improvement	
	GOOD	**BAD**	**HIGH**	**LOW**
1. Suspicion Must Be Dispelled.		■	■	
2. The Unique Identity of the Other Must Be Acknowledged.	■		■	
3. Human Freedom Must Be Affirmed.		■		■
4. Our Limitations as Continuous Learners Must Be Accepted.		■		■

Current Interreligious-*Theological* Conditions	**GOOD**	**BAD**	**HIGH**	**LOW**
5. General Agreement on Divine Revelation (*Wahy*)		■		■
6. General Agreement on the Stature of Muhammad as Prophet		■		■
7. General Agreement on the Status of the *Qur'an*		■		■
8. General Agreement on Statements of the Unity of the Divine Principle	■		■	
9. General Agreement on Salvation (*falaah*) Doctrines		■		■
10. General Agreement on Divine Law (*Shari'ah*)		■		■
11. General Agreement on the Destiny of Jerusalem		■		■
12. General Agreement on Evangelization (*Da'wah*)		■	■	
13. Developing a Cogent Theology of Religions		■	■	

Current Interreligious-*Existential* Conditions	**GOOD**	**BAD**	**HIGH**	**LOW**
14. Rethinking Civilizational Friction Dynamics		■	■	
15. Revising Our Understanding of Relativism and the Encounter of Cultures		■	■	
16. Planning and Supporting Social, Political, and Economic Improvements		■	■	
17. Understanding Theology as Dialogue		■		■
18. Attending More to the Spiritual Dimension		■		■

Finally, by relating our assessments of the current situation and the related probability of improvement for each condition (1-18), we arrive at an overall sense of the current prospects for interreligious dialogue.

Current Situation	HIGH	LOW
GOOD	2, 8	
BAD	1, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18

Probability of Improvement

Thoughtful readers might raise objections to these prognostications. One objection might be that this analysis lacks objectivity. Indeed it does. Even though our evaluations here have been based on evidential considerations and constrained by some rigor, they are perforce subjective. Certainly, other observers might arrive at different assessments based on their own background knowledge and priviledged perspectives.

Another objection might be that not all of these conditions can be considered to have the same "weight." True enough. By sorting these conditions according to some metric of importance or significance, we might arrive at a more accurate prognosis. But then, that effort would also add another layer of subjective judgements—no objectively calibrated metric is possible in this type of study.

According to this summation, the overall prospects for interreligious dialogue at the beginning of the 21st century do not look favorable. But diligent readers might object that the assessment results are ambiguous, noting that ten conditions fall into the low-probability category versus eight that are highly probable to improve. Considering the subjective nature of the analysis, a 10 to 8 score is a close call—there is no obvious convergence toward a conclusion of either high or low probability. Perhaps we are at a tipping point?

CONCLUSION

During Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic trip to Turkey at the end of November 2006, he met with Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer; Ali Bardokoglu, Grand Mufti and highest Muslim authority in Turkey; Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople; the Armenian Patriarch Mesrob I; the Syro-Orthodox metropolitan; and the chief rabbi of Turkey. This was a trip that had been in the planning since 2004—a trip planned originally for the late Pope John Paul. For Benedict, the long-planned trip became a prime opportunity to negotiate with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I about next steps for reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christianity, and to seek reciprocity with Islam.

But after the very angry response of Muslims to the Pope's controversial use of a negative quote from the the 14th century Christian Emperor Manuel II Paleologos during his speech only about ten weeks prior at the University of Regensburg, it was extremely critical that he not make a similar offensive reference during this trip. Even though a few Muslim writers and intellectuals like Tarik Ramadan, Khaled Hroub, and Abdelwahab Al Affendi have criticized the general Muslim response to that quote as aggressive, intolerant, and contrary to Islamic ideals, a broad consensus persists among many informed Muslims that the Pope had been disrespectful by using the offending quote in the first place, and then by not acknowledging his gaffe by apologizing for it.

On the Sunday before the Pope arrived in Ankara, a large demonstration was organized by the Islamic Felicity Party, a small political group that is not represented in the Turkish parliament. According to police estimates, about 25,000 people joined this demonstration that featured a "huge poster [that] showed pictures of a crusader and of violence in the Middle East."

(BBC News 2006f) Although fairly large, this was not a popular demonstration by devout Turks. More nearly, it was a media event that was well planned by a fringe political group.

So, after his comments about Turkey's tenuous claim to membership in the European Union, coupled with the uproar after Regensburg, this apostolic trip to Turkey became a litmus test of sorts—an indicator of whether the course of near-term Christian-Muslim dialogues could be expected to improve or not.

Overall, the apostolic trip to Turkey appears to have been a success. (Kramer 2007, 65) The Pope consistently spoke of brotherhood and common cause, he offered clear symbolic gestures of mutual respect, and neither his words nor deeds precipitated any major new response of outrage from Muslims. One keen observer noted:

> Benefict made his spiritually fraternal gestures. He held hands and prayed—beside but not together—with the Grand Mufti of Instanbul in the Blue Mosque. No one seemed offended by his obvious unease, perhaps because most Turks, Muslim and Christian, were just as anxious. "We are *praying* for this blessing to be over," an Orthodox friend I phoned in Instanbul that day said. (Kramer 2007, 65)

This difficult trip appears to have achieved the goals that Benedict himself mentioned during his flight to Ankara:

> "The objective of this trip is dialogue, fraternity, a commitment in favor of understanding between cultures and religions, in favor of reconciliation," said the Pope. The value of this trip "is symbolic and consists of the meetings themselves of friendship and respect, in a common commitment to peace and fraternity," stated the Pontiff, responding to journalists' questions. (Zenit 2006l)

Messages of brotherhood and common cause were interwoven throughout the discourses, texts, and images that created the public tapestry of this trip. The apparent communication strategy was to present a clear and unambiguous message by using recurring, core messages, together with corroborating quotes from the recent past. From the start, on the first day of his trip

when he met Ali Bardakoglu, chief of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directories, the Pope noted that he was asking the same questions posed by his predecessor:

> For my own part, I also wish to highlight the qualities of the Turkish population. Here I make my own the words of my immediate predecessor, Pope John Paul II of blessed memory, who said on the occasion of his visit in 1979: “I wonder if it is not urgent, precisely today when Christians and Muslims have entered a new period of history, to recognize and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us, in order to preserve and promote together, for the benefit of all men, ‘peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.’” These questions have continued to present themselves throughout the intervening years; indeed, as I indicated at the very beginning of my Pontificate, they impel us to carry forward our dialogue as a sincere exchange between friends. (Benedict XVI 2006e)

A recurring theme was the sacred character and dignity of the human person as the basis for dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims:

> Christians and Muslims, following their respective religions, point to the truth of the sacred character and dignity of the person. This is the basis of our mutual respect and esteem, this is the basis for cooperation in the service of peace between nations and peoples, the dearest wish of all believers and all people of good will. (Benedict XVI 2006e)

The Pope again reached back into early Christian-Muslim history—this time quoting an observer with a very different point of view from that of Emperor Manuel II Paleologos:

> As an illustration of the fraternal respect with which Christians and Muslims can work together, I would like to quote some words addressed by Pope Gregory VII in 1076 to a Muslim prince in North Africa who had acted with great benevolence toward the Christians under his jurisdiction. Pope Gregory spoke of the particular charity that Christians and Muslims owe to one another "because we believe in one God, albeit in a different manner, and because we praise him and worship him every day as the Creator and Ruler of the world." (Benedict XVI 2006e)

And again, the Pope spoke clearly about the need for real reciprocity in extending religious freedoms to minority religious groups and persons:

> Freedom of religion, institutionally guaranteed and effectively respected in practice, both for individuals and communities, constitutes for all believers the necessary condition for their loyal contribution to the building up of society, in an attitude of authentic service, especially toward the most vulnerable and the poor. (Benedict XVI 2006e)

The consistemt, recurring messages of unity and brotherhood, common purpose, mutual respect, peace in the Middle East, and reciprocity came amid various events and meetings—some substantive, but mostly symbolic. On the final day of the trip, the Pope visited the Blue Mosque in Istanbul where he had silent prayer alongside senior Muslim clerics—only the second papal visit in history to a Muslim place of worship. The general hope was that it would be seen as a conciliatory gesture after the Regensburg lecture. But perhaps the most important symbolic aspect of this trip was the destination—Turkey—a cultural bridge between Christianity and Islam. So, Turkey itself can be seen as a metaphor for the conditions, needs, and dynamics of future dialogue and cultural reflection.

> The Pope added that at the origin of modern Turkey is dialogue with European reason, with its way of thinking and living, which must be carried out in a different historical and religious context. Benedict XVI continued: "That is why the dialogue between European reason and Muslim tradition is inscribed in the very existence of modern Turkey, and in this we have a mutual responsibility: We, Europeans, must rethink our secular reasoning, which excludes the religious dimension from public life and leads to a dead end.(Zenit 2006l)

Clearly, the Pope is again calling for dialogue as the only possible way to create a future synthesis of secularism and tradition, reason and faith—the only possible path forward for both Christians and Muslims at the beginning of this century:

> Turkey, for its part, beginning from its history must think with Europeans how to reconstruct for the future the nexus between secularism and tradition, between open and tolerant reason, which has as its fundamental element freedom, and those essential values of religion that give content to freedom. (Zenit 2006l)

With the Pope's gestures and words of brotherhood and respect—grounded by a common bond of reason—we have grounds for optimism about the near-term prospects for Christian-Muslim dialogue. But we temper this optimism with concern about the long-term consequences of Benedict's shifting of interreligious dialogue away from theological dimensions to a more pragmatic dialogue about common goals and arrangements. With natural human reason bridging

our cultural divide, Benedict looks to be attempting to carry dialogue forward with a version of Vatican *realpolitik*—dialogue based on strictly practical rather than theological ideas, and on real reciprocity in freedom of worship.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, formerly headed by Michael Fitzgerald, has now been delegated to the conservative Cardinal Paul Poupard—head of the Pontifical Council for Culture. Now, the "interreligious" aspects of dialogue have been subsumed by cultural language. Fitzgerald's departure from Rome and assignment to Cairo appears to be a clear move in this direction—a new strategy to directly engage Muslims, primarily at a diplomatic/political level.

> In today's Vatican, "cultural dialogue" is a code for relations with religions that, by Benedict's definition, cannnot sustain a theological relationship with Catholicism. There is, of course, nothing wrong with the idea of cultural dialogue. It can mean that you start focusing on very concrete problems, and even try to resolve those problems. (Kramer 2007, 64)

With frequent reminders about the dangers of syncretism, even when learning how to open our arms to each other as spiritual brothers and sisters, Benedict also seems to be calling for Christian Europe to remember and hold fast to its historical religious identity, where dialogue about contradictory religious beliefs is pointless, and possibly dangerous. But this path appears to lead to a very exclusivist theological stance and it prompts a vexing question: Can the religious dimensions be separated out from culture? Certainly, with a shift away from theological to more cultural dialogue, with a stronger focus on common needs and concerns, some solutions and other positive consequences can be expected. But Benedict, the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (also called the Holy Office or Inquisition), may be sending a mixed message with the culture-only approach:

> On the other hand, it can mean that, in shutting the last theological windows of Vaticaln II, you are dismissing Islam as one more "gravely deficient" sect. (Kramer 2007, 64)

Benedict seems to hold that insofar as Christianity and Islam do not have shared definitions of what is rational, then to that extent, theological dialogue is improbable. He seems to be making agreement about what is reasonable to be the new point of departure for Christian-Muslim dialogue. Who, we wonder, will be the final judge of what is reasonable?

> …Robert Mickens says, "Ratzinger is Eurocentric. To him, Europe means Christianity." It may be that in reducing Islam to a "culture," an artifact of its time and place and circumstances, Benedict ends up reducing Christianity to a culture, too. (Kramer 2007, 67)

Today, there appears to be a new Vatican vision of interreligious dialogue, a more constricted universe of discourse, diminished in content and method. Nevertheless, for Christian-Muslim dialogue today, there are clear signs of hope—if not at the theological level, then at least at a "cultural" level. Our optimism, however, is very cautious. We recognize that our assessment may be biased by our own beliefs about how loss of hope is somehow not an option. Referring to the four-fold distinction the PCID made for the meanings of interreligious dialogue, Michael Fitzgerald reminded us of our very precarious position before 9-11 and the challenge that was looming. His question then may be an even more pointed goad today:

> All this may seem very idealistic. It is true that we have to take reality into account; that we have to take people as they are. Nevertheless we have to keep ideals before us, we have to maintain a vision, otherwise we shall just resign ourselves to constant conflict. As a new millennium approaches, should we not set our sights higher? (Fitzgerald 2000)

* * *

GLOSSARY

Ahl al-Dhimma—Communities of non-Muslims (Jewish, Christian or otherwise) who came under Muslim rule historically and accepted a "protected" status that allowed them to continue practicing their faith without hindrance. *Dhimmis* were required to pay a special tax called *jizyah* to the state, and the state was a guarantor of their rights as a subordinate group within medieval Muslim society. The two terms *Ahl al-Kitab* and *Ahl al-Dhimma* are often used interchangeably, but have different connotations. See: *Ahl al-Kitab*

Ahl al-Kitab—People of the Book. A *Qur'anic* designation referring to Jews, Christians and other faith communities whom Muslims believe received divinely-revealed scriptures in history. The term establishes a spiritual kinship among the monotheistic faith traditions that hold Abraham as a patriarch. See: *Ahl al-Dhimma.*

Dar-ul-Islam—House or abode of Islam. Sometimes used to refer to lands ruled by Islamic *Shari'ah*.

da'wah—Inviting others to Islam. Missionary work.

dhimmi —A non-Muslim living under the protection of Islamic rule.

falaah—Success. Real success lies in "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil..." (Surah Aali Imran (3):104). One of the sentences that is said during the *Adhan* and *Iqama*, "*Haya 'alal Falaah*" (Come to Success). Other derivations: *Muflih* = the person who is successful, the person whose deeds and actions have gained Allah Ta'ala's pleasure.

Hadith—Reports on the sayings and the traditions of Muhammad or what he witnessed and approved are called *Hadith*. These are the real explanation, interpretation, and the living example of the Prophet for teachings of the *Qur'an*. His sayings are found in books called the *Hadith* books. Some famous collectors of *Hadith* are Imam Al-Bukhari, Imam Muslim, Imam An-Nasa'i, Imam Abu Dawood, Imam At-Tirmizi, and Imam Majah. There are many others.

Hajj—Pilgrimage. To perform the pilgrimage to the Holy City of Makkah at least once in one's lifetime if one is able to afford it.

Hijrah—Migration. The Hijrah refers to the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Madinah. This journey took place in the twelfth year of his mission (622 C.E.). This is the beginning of the Muslim calendar. The word hijrah means to leave a place to seek sancturary or freedom from persecution or freedom of religion or any other purpose. Hijrah can also mean to leave a bad way of life for a good or more righteous way.

Imam—The person who leads the Muslim prayer or service.

Islam—Submission to the will of Allah. It is said that Allah Himself names His life transaction "*al-Islam*" and describes all the followers of this way of life, in every age, as "Muslims." The life transaction of Allah has five pillars, all of which must be strictly adhered to in word, deed and sincere belief. *Islam* is an Arabic word the root of which is *Silm* and *Salam*. It means among others: peace, greeting, salutation, obedience, loyalty, allegiance,

and submission to the will of the Creator of the Universe.

jihad—One of the eight gates of *Jannah* (Paradise). Also, a holy war in the cause of Allah and His commands. Jihad takes many forms, amongst which are: *Jihad an-Nafs* - fighting against one's own evil waits and trying one's utmost to be a better person in the sight of Allah; and *Jihad al Akbar* - physically fighting against the enemies of Allah *Subhana wa Ta'ala*. The root of *Jihad* is *Jahada*, which means to strive for a better way of life. The nouns are *Juhd*, *Mujahid*, *Jihad*, and *Ijtihad*. The other meanings are: endeavor, strain, exertion, effort, diligence, fighting to defend one's life, land, and religion.

Jinn (Al)—The Jinn. A race of created beings that are made out of smokeless fire. They are like the *Ins* (human race) in many ways: They are born, have children and die. They also have friends and family; There are Muslims and *Kuffar* amongst them; They eat food, but their food consists mainly of bones and stool.

jizyah—A tax paid by non-Muslims living in a Muslim state. Since the non-Muslims are exempt from military service and taxes imposed on Muslims, they must pay this tax to compensate. It guarantees them security and protection. If the State cannot protect those who paid jizyah, then the amount they paid is returned to them.

khalifah—Successor or representative of Muhammad or of one of his successors (English: Caliph). This person acts as the head of state for the Muslim *Ummah*. Another title for the *Khalifah* is Amir Al-Mu'mineen which means 'the leaders of the believers'. The immediate Caliphs were Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, Othman Ibn 'Affan, and 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib. These were given the nickname of Al-Khulafa'Ar-Rashidun (The Guided Caliphs). *Khalifah* (representative) can also refer to humanity in general. The human being is considered the *Khalifah* of Allah on Earth according to Muslims.

kuffar —Plural form of *kafir*, a person who refuses to submit himself to Allah, a disbeliever in God.

Nahda(Al)—Awakening or renaissance. A cultural and intellectual trend in the Arab world in the late 19th century and early 20th century, initially centered in modern-day Lebanon, then largely moving to Egypt. The *al-Nahda* movement was one of the major trends in Arab thought and culture and had far-reaching effects on Arab literature, politics, culture and even religion. It is often regarded in the Arab world as the counterpart of the European Enlightenment era, and a period of intellectual modernization and reform. *Al-Nahda* played a part in the rise of nationalism to challenge European colonial domination. The movement was heavily influenced by European thinking and ideologies, or in some cases, the perceived need to counter such influences by strengthening Arab or Islamic cultural cohesion. Often, the *Nahda* is seen as connected to the cultural shock brought on by Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. (Also: *an-Nahda*)

Qur'an—The holy book of Islam. It was revealed to Muhammad from Allah through angel Gabriel (Jibril) for a period of 23 years. There is only one *Qur'an* in the whole world and it is in the Arabic language. The *Qur'an* has one text, one language, and one dialect. Any translation is considered to be the explanation to the meaning of the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* is composed of 114 Surah (chapters). When it is to be touched or recited, a Muslim must be in a state of cleanliness and purity.

Shaitan —Satan. An evil Jinn who prompts mankind and Jinn to rebel against Allah. Muslims seek refuge in Allah from the evil that He has created . Plural: Shayateen. See Holy Qur'an, An-Nisaa (4):117-120.

Shari'ah—A road. The revealed and the canonical laws of the religion of Islam. Islamic law as ordained by Allah Ta'ala. The *Shari'a* is the legal and social modality of a people based on the revelation of their prophet. The last *Shari'a* in history is that of Islam. It abrogates all previous *Shari'as*. The legislative power in the government lies in the hands of a legislative assembly. The legislators are to make rules and regulations within the scope and dimensions of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. These rules constitute the *Shari'ah*.

Shi'a—Followers. Muslims who believe in the *Imamah*, successorship of Ali after Muhammad and eleven of his most pious, knowledgeable descendants. *Shi'a* Muslims believe that specific persons from Muhammad's family (the *Imams*) were the best source of knowledge about the *Qur'an*, Islam, and Emulation (the best-qualified teachers of Islam after Muhammad), and the most trusted carriers and protectors of Muhammad's *Sunnah* (traditions). *Shi'a* Muslims recognize the succession of Ali (Muhammad's cousin, son-in-law, the first young man to accept Islam — second person only to Muhammad's wife Khadija —and the male head of the Ahl al-Bayt or "people of the [Prophet's] house") as opposed to that of the caliphate recognized by Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims believe that Ali was appointed successor by Muhammad's direct order on many occasions, and that he is therefore the rightful leader of the Muslim faith pursuant to the Prophet's wishes. A minority denomination of Islam.

Sunni—Muslims who believe in the successorship of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali (the Four Righteous Caliphs) after Muhammad. The majority denomination of Islam.

sunnah—Habit, practice, customary procedure, or action, norm and usage sanctioned by tradition. Specifically, any time the word *Sunnah* is mentioned, it is to refer to Prophet Muhammad. Here it means his sayings, practices, living habits. The *Hadith* are reports on the *Sunnah*. The two major legal sources of jurisprudence in Islam are the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*. The *Sunnah* may confirm what is mentioned in *Qur'an*, interpret and explain it, specify what is meant by some general verses, limit and restrict the meaning of some verse in it, or may explain something that has been revealed in *Qur'an*. The *Sunnah* has a high authority in Islam; and Allah in many places in the *Qur'an* orders the Muslims to follow the teachings of Prophet Mohammad.

ulama—The learned, knowledgeable people in Islam. The religious scholars of Islam. Plural form of *alim*.

ummah—A community or a people. It is used in reference to the community of Believers or Muslims. The *Unimah* of Muhammad refers to every *Ins wal Jinn* (mankind and Jinn) born after the final message was revealed through the Holy Prophet Muhammad who have embraced Islam. The *Ummah* of Muhammad can be subdivided into two groups.

wahy—Revelation. Inspiration placed in the heart or mind of the prophets by Allah Ta'ala. *Auha*, *Uhiya* and *Wahyun* derive from the same root, *'Wahy'*.

The primary source used to compile this glossary was:

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