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**THE MYSTERY OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN
CHRISTIANITY AND IN ISLAM
The Foundation for Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

Supervisor

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DEDICATION

To my two parents, Cécile Ouédraogo and Moïse Sawadogo, who were called back to God respectively in 1996 and 2006. I dedicate this work to them for their efforts to educate me.

EPIGRAPH

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins"(Matthew 1:18-21).

He said: "So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, 'That is easy for Me: and (We Wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us': It is a matter (So) decreed" (S 19: 21).

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned declare that this research proposal is my original work achieved through reading, scientific research, and critical reflection. This work has never been submitted to any institute of learning for academic grading. All information from other sources and work consulted has been cited and acknowledge.

Signed.....

Name of Student:

Date:

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:

Name of Supervisor:

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ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Ad Gentes
Acts	Book of the Acts of the Apostles
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CV	Caritatis in Veritate
Cor	The Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians
DP	Dialogue and Proclamation
DV	Dei Verbum
Eph	Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians
Ex	The Book of Exodus
Gal	The Letter of Saint to the Galatians
Gn	The Book of Genesis
GS	Gaudium et Spes
Jn	The Gospel according to John
LG	Lumen Gentium
Lk	The Gospel According to Luke
NA	Nostra Aetate

NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Phil	The Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians
Q	Qur`an
Rom	The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans
S	Surah

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1 Background of the Problem

Gaudium et Spes number 22 states: “In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. [...]. It is no wonder, then, that all the truths mentioned so far should find in him their source and their most perfect embodiment”(GS, 22). One of these truths is mentioned by *Gaudium et Spes* as follows: “For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.” In this affirmation of *Gaudium et Spes* lies the central question of my reflection and research that can be divided into three parts. First, the question is, if this is one of the truths, how do we understand it and what are the other truths that *Gaudium et Spes* is referring to? Are these truths found strictly speaking only in Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular or, to some extent, in Islam? Secondly, if these truths are present somehow in Islam, how can we find them and to what extent are they important or challenging to Christianity, and Islam? This is the mystery of Christ’s presence. Thirdly, how can these truths affect our catholic mind and life for a better

understanding of Jesus` presence in Christianity and Islam in view of a long lasting Christian-Muslim dialogue? Why is it that the search for these truths in history has brought so much animosity and strife between Christians and Muslims? Beyond the mere sense of morality, what can be a just and prudent theological approach to the search for the truth of Christ`s presence or incarnation in the two religions for a daily peaceful and respectful Christian-Muslim dialogue?

From my two years pastoral experience in Khartoum added to my experience with Muslims since my childhood, I am interested in researching the importance of the mystery of Christ`s presence in Christianity and in Islam. I am convinced that Christian-Muslim dialogue for peace would be sincere provided that both parties have a true knowledge of one another. This peace certainly requires two things. The first is a true appreciation of other religions values. The second is to struggle to be on the side of God rather than to fight to show that God is on one`s side.

0.2 Statement of the Problem

Speaking of the mystery of the presence in Christianity and in Islam, one situates this in the general debate in the Catholic Church between the “fulfillment theory” and the “presence of the mystery of Christ” in other religions proposed by Rahner and Panikkar. We are aware of the difficulty in reconciling these two theories as Dupuis puts it. “The distance between the ‘fulfillment theory’ and the theory of the ‘presence of the mystery of Christ’ in other religious traditions is indeed substantial.”¹ Moreover, in the history of the Church, Christians have in many ways significantly

¹ J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 52

failed to uphold the image of the Church, the body of Christ as the sacrament of peace in their relation with Muslims. Muslims for their part, based on the Qur`an, accuse Christians of being unbelievers and having falsified the Bible the true word of God.

0.3 Objectives

I aim at showing that Christianity and Islam have more in common about Christ than the differences, based on their respective sacred texts. Finding the most elementary and common signs of Christ's presence in the two religions can lead us to a deeper understanding and meaning of the mystery of Christ so as to enhance our missionary activity. To establish a dialogue at a deeper level between Catholics and Muslims, a starting point of mutual respect and acceptance of the differences is necessary.

0.4 Basic Assumptions

The spirit of true, deep and active dialogue has been handicapped by the suspicion that each party was fighting to prove the other wrong as someone said about Muslims: give them an inch and they will take a mile. And Muslims would qualify Christians as infidels who distorted the truth. This is what we may call the "spirit of prejudice". Christ who is the common point of departure has been always used to accuse the other partner in dialogue of blasphemy. Social, cultural and political affiliations prevented the partners in dialogue from considering each other as a worthy partner of dialogue. The Catholic Church I believe has the fullness of revelation of God but has it the fullness of the understanding of it? This is where the mystery lies. For this reason, even though we should not deny the laws that govern the Church as an institution, we

should be humble and courageous enough to learn from Islam and challenge ourselves if need be.

0.5 Significance of the Study

The study will have both a theological and pastoral significance for missionaries who engage themselves in the field of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Doctrinally they will know what the problem is in order to rightly and respectfully face it in dialogue with Moslems. This means that, first, this research will be based on a systematic study of the sacred texts of the two religions guided by my personal experience of Christian-Muslim relations.

0.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

My study will focus strictly on the mystery of Christ's presence in Christianity and in Islam. This consists in showing how Christ, understood and believed in the Catholic Church, is already mysteriously present in many of Islam's sacred texts and beliefs. By searching on this presence, I hope to find ways of building a lasting Christian-Muslim dialogue.

0.7 Methodology of my Research

The major part of the reflection will be based on literary research. This will be enhanced by my personal experience of Islam since childhood and especially my missionary experience in Khartoum, Sudan. The research will be organized into three chapters and each will contain an introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter will have titles and subtitles using Latin and Arabic numbering. Besides, the whole research includes a general introduction and conclusion.

0.8 Content

The main body of my research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter examines the mystery of Christ and the Church. This first chapter is meant to lay the foundation of my reflection and research on the mystery of Christ in Islam. For this reason, the whole chapter will consist in showing how Christ is the full revelation of the mystery of God`s will to humanity. By this same revelation, humanity is revealed to itself by being shown the way to its destiny, that is, eternal happiness. This will take into account how the Catholic Christology and soteriology had been challenged and evolved from the Second Vatican Council to nowadays as far as Islam is concerned. To do this, my starting point of reflection is from Abraham`s call to the paschal mystery of Christ passion, death and resurrection.

The second chapter will explore the mystery of Christ in Islamic books. This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part will deal with the mystery of Christ in the Qur`an. In the second part I will show how Christ was and still is present positively in Islamic faith, culture, and history with the *Hadiths* and other Islamic writings. Secondly, I will show how my experience of Christian-Muslim relation in Khartoum convinced me of the possibility and necessity of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The third chapter will focus on Jesus as the foundation of Christian-Muslim Dialogue. This chapter will show that after analyzing Catholic Christology and soteriology based on the mystery of Christ`s presence in Christianity and Islam, Christ remains the foundation on which any Christian-Muslim dialogue should be built.

CHAPTER I

The Mystery of Christ in the Catholic Church

Introduction

This first chapter of my project considers that Christ is the revelation of God and his will to humanity and that through various symbols he is present in the Catholic Church. In doing so, I hope to be able to shed more light on the mystery of Christ's presence in Islam in view of a Christian-Muslim dialogue.

With O'Donnell I agree that this is a major dogmatic issue and I do not pretend that such a topic can be dealt with thoroughly in this kind of long essay. "Many theologians have acknowledged the fact that it is probably impossible today to write an entire Christian dogmatics."²

However, being not just a mere Catholic believer but also a person who seeks an understanding of the reason why he believes as Saint Anselm says³, I dare to find the most adequate ways of understanding this mystery, by asking the following questions that will guide us to an appropriate plan of reflection. Can we understand this mystery

² J.J. O'DONNELL, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, vii.

³ Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 13.

through the sole interpretation of the Catholic Church or are there some other ways? How did this mystery unfold in Jesus? What are the criteria of judging and stating correctly this mystery of revelation and the presence of God in Christ? What is the role of the Church in this? To respond to these important questions, I will adopt the following plan.

In the first place, I will show how the coming of Christ gradually unfolded in the people of Israel, starting from the call of Abraham to the messianic expectation. Then comes God's Trinitarian self-revelation in the Incarnation, the ministry of Jesus Christ, his passion-death and resurrection, and Christ's presence in the Church since then until today and until the end of time. "Thus salvation history extends from the beginning of history to its end, from creation to the end of the world. Christian faith places the Jesus Christ event at its centre. This is to be understood not chronologically, but theologically."⁴ In the second place, I will show how the seven sacraments are the symbols of Christ's efficacious presence and, at the same time, a call to Christians to perpetuate this presence by living specific values for the kingdom of God. In the third part I will examine the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the understanding of the mystery of divine revelation in view of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

⁴ J. DUPUIS, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 116.

1. The Mystery of Christ in the Catholic Church

1.1 What is Mystery?

“The word mystery is certainly one of the most important key-words of Christianity and its theology.”⁵ From a literary point of view, mystery is the quality of being difficult to understand or to explain and therefore makes something or somebody interesting or exciting.⁶ In this sense, I can already say that Christ for me falls into this category. From a Catholic understanding, the word mystery is synonymous with the word sacrament. “The meaning of a sacrament for Christians should be understood in light of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, who himself is the fundamental Sacrament, the heart of the mystery of God mediated through creation and God`s redemptive purpose for humanity and the world.”⁷ I believe that Christ is the visible reality of God, and the works of the Holy Spirit through the seven sacraments of the Church which are the continuous visible signs of the same reality of God who manifested himself in Christ (Jn1:14).

Rene Latourelle says that Christ is not only a mystery but encompasses many mysteries. By this he meant that the Church`s teaching and dogmas or creed are also mysteries. This is what he says in his own way in the following statement. “It is not the Incarnation, *Cross and *Resurrection alone that are of universal significance for the salvation of all in and despite their historical uniqueness and contingency, are therefore the subject-matter of dogma, creed, anamnesis, and praise and in this sense

⁵ Cf. “Mystery”, in *Encyclopaedia of Theology*, 1000.

⁶ Cf. *Oxford Advanced Learner`s Dictionary*.

⁷ “Sacrament”, in *The New Interpreter`s Dictionary of the Bible V5*, 16.

‘mysteries.’”⁸ Rahner continues in the same line to say that the same is true of all the events of the life of Jesus that should be considered to have the same character as his death and resurrection.⁹ Moreover, mystery is necessarily understood in three dimensions of time - past, present and future.

We often interpret this as merely a making public or an unveiling of something that has always been there but was kept hidden. Revelation is however, an event in which God commits in the present to be involved with his people in the future. He reveals himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in other words as the God who has been active in past history and who precisely for this reason will also be the God of the future.¹⁰

This is to say that we have to connect the history of salvation to the life and ministry of Jesus, his death and resurrection and finally to his future coming. Doing so, we understand best the mystery of salvation as a whole, starting with the Old Testament.

1.2 Mystery in the Old Testament

1.2.1 Importance of the Scripture and Church Tradition

“While God is transcendent, he does make himself known in two ways: through his wonderful works in creation and through Christ, who is taught to us in the Scriptures and given to us in the sacraments.”¹¹ We often hear that theology is necessarily biblical and contextual. The reason behind this saying is in the fact that revelation is put into writing in the scriptures and lived in the Church`s tradition. Moreover, the Scriptures

⁸ R. KARL – H. VORGRIMLER, “Mysteries of the Life of Jesus”, in *Dictionary of Theology*, 322.

⁹ R. KARL – H. VORGRIMLER, “Mysteries of the Life of Jesus”, in *Dictionary of Theology*, 322

¹⁰ Cf. D.J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*, 17

¹¹ R. LATOURELLE, - R. FISICHELLA, “The Scriptures and the Problem of Human Language”, in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 398

and Tradition constitute the source of theology whose purpose is to interpret this revelation for the concrete situation of a given community for more understanding. This is to say that theology is faith seeking understanding as Dupuis explains.¹² However, in carrying out this task, theologians are confronted with the problem of criteria that may guide them to the best interpretation of the message of the Scriptures.

We know that every interpretation depends on the context and the cultural approach of the person who elaborates it. We know, moreover, that Christians believe that their understanding of Christ is modeled on the faith that illuminates the Christian intellect so that it may grasp, as far as possible, the reality of Christ. But we also know that in every “revelation” it is up to us, limited historical beings, to understand the language of the “revealed words”. The divine revelation is received by our limited human minds: *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* (“Whatever is received is received in conformity with the modality of the receiver”). The divine “revelation” thus becomes also human revelation.¹³

From the above statement, we see clearly that humanity is an indispensable channel of revelation. Therefore, the concept “human revelation” should be understood in the sense that it is the Spirit of God who inspires the human author who cannot but use human means to transmit the revelation into writing or memory. In this line we may agree with the following statement: “Writers in both the OT and the NT value “truth” in the sense of correspondence between words and reality. Yet also often use words metaphorically, sacrificing some descriptive correspondence in order to communicate realities difficult to grasp with ‘literal’ language.”¹⁴ So, while interpreting the Scriptures, the role of the Spirit and of humans should be taken into consideration. On one hand, as

¹² J. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 13

¹³ R. PANIKKAR, *Christophany The Fullness of Man*, 3

¹⁴ “Truth”, in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible V5*, 681

far as inspiration is concerned, “what was written in the Spirit must be read in the Spirit.”¹⁵ On the other hand, as far as human means are concerned, the cultural background and the literary genre and the context and intention of the author of any sacred text should be considered while interpreting it for our contemporary context.

1.2.1 The Mystery in God’s Self-revelation to the Patriarchs

Why should we go back to the Patriarchs? The reason is that, “the Church of Christ acknowledges that in God’s plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets” (NA 4). Another reason is that, “there is, for the Christian Church and Christian theology, no New Testament divorced from the Old Testament.”¹⁶ Moreover, the Bible is not only the best document for this search but, in the Old Testament, we also have many features in common with the Qur`an about the Patriarchs. “The question is, has the central Christian statement that God is present and manifested in Jesus Christ any meaning? Is it a coherent, acceptable, intelligible statement? Are there any indications in history that an event as astonishing as this has occurred?”¹⁷ The answer is yes because Abraham is the precursor of Jesus in obedience to God’s will and is known as our ancestor in faith.

“The Patriarchs are the founding fathers of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”¹⁸

From this, there are two important questions we need to answer. First, how did the Patriarchs come to know the God that Christ revealed? Second, is there any direct connection between the mystery of Christ and the revelation of the God of the

¹⁵ Cf. G. O`COLLINS, *Fundamental Theology*, 250.

¹⁶ D.J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*, 16

¹⁷ R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Sign of Salvation*, 5

¹⁸ “Patriarchs”, in *Encyclopaedia of Theology*, 398

Patriarchs? To respond to the first question we should say that the mystery here is in the fact that God did not reveal himself in Jesus once for all and only to one person but in stages to each of the three Patriarchs.

A number of passages show Yahweh carrying out His plans from the very beginnings of humanity and revealing Himself more and more clearly through the long line of patriarchs. This is the point of view of the Yahwist historian [...] a point of view that is rearranged and completed by the priestly history (Ex 6:3).¹⁹

The Elohist writer says that the God that revealed himself to Moses as Yahweh was God the Father. This means the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6, 15). The Priestly author, talking about the same God, names him as El Shaddai (Ex 6: 3). “The Yahwist writer also uses the name Yahweh in all its patriarchal stories from the call of Abraham onwards (Gn 12:1) and even made the worship of Yahweh go back to the very origins of man himself, to the time of Enosh, Seth’s son (Gn 4:26).”²⁰ Mysteriously, Jesus revealed one God, the Father whom the Patriarchs discovered in stages. “Some scholars believe that true monotheism began with Moses.”²¹ However, this understanding is not shared by those who are in favor of the second source from which the religion of the Patriarchs can be traced, that is the traditions of the near East. “Scholars of the ancient Near East generally place its origins among the ancient Israelites, but there is still controversy over exactly when, where, and how monotheism

¹⁹ Cf. L. DUFOUR, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 690

²⁰ R.D. VAUX, *The Early History of Israel, From the Beginnings to the Exodus and Covenant of Sinai*, 268

²¹ R.D. VAUX, *The Early History of Israel, From the Beginnings to the Exodus and Covenant of Sinai*, 462

arose.”²² Another opinion expresses this same difficulty about the origin of monotheism. “The story begins with the emergence of monotheism. It seems to have taken monotheism quite a while to emerge as a belief system in the long intellectual history of humanity.”²³ This faith of the Patriarchs was based on the covenant made by God with Abraham to give him a prosperity (Gn 12:1-3; 15:5).

“By his covenant with Abraham (Gn 15:18) and, through Moses, with the race of Israel (Ex 24:8), God did acquire a people for himself, and to them he revealed himself in words and deeds as the one, true, living God, so that Israel might experience the ways of God with men” (DV 14). However, Israel failed to abide by the obligations of the covenant and consequently underwent tough experiences and therefore had to look for prosperity still from God but under a different type of hope. This is how the messianic expectation was born.

1.2.2 The Mystery behind the Messianic Expectation

The mystery of the messianic expectation is clearly seen in the meaning of the word itself. “The term *Mashiakh* refers to the legitimate king. It does not have a future or eschatological connotation in the OT. In the Second Temple period, when there was no longer a king on the throne, the term came to refer to the one who would restore the kingship.”²⁴ This means that from the origin of the idea of messianic expectation nothing pointed directly to Jesus Christ as the one who will reveal God and be the

²² E. H. BRADFORD – A.O. IRFAN, *Heirs of Abraham, The Future of Muslim, Jewish and Christian Relations*, 21

²³ E. H. BRADFORD – A.O. IRFAN, *Heirs of Abraham, The Future of Muslim, Jewish and Christian Relations*, 21

²⁴ “Messiah” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* V4, 59

savior of Israel and of humanity. It only became clearer by a process like discovering monotheism as Israel was elected freely by God. “The purpose of the election is service, and when this is withheld, election loses its meaning.”²⁵ The service referred to here is to the marginalized who are the orphan, the widow, the poor, and the stranger and the state of purity before Yahweh. This was rather a failure for Israel. “As the political and social conditions of the people of the old covenant deteriorate, there increasingly develops the expectation that, one day, the Messiah will come to conquer the Gentile nations and restore Israel.”²⁶ However, nothing improved for Israel. Indeed the situation got worse contrasting with God’s promise of prosperity. This is well expressed in the *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. “The cognitive dissonance caused by the discrepancy between the divine promise and present reality is the root of messianic expectation.”²⁷

The prophet Haggai (2:23) prophesised that Zerubbabel would be the deliverer by building the Temple after Judah’s exile. The disappearance of Zerubabel disappointed the people who then instead of looking at their present for the deliverer, looked ahead into the future. The people realized that the promise would not have immediate fulfillment. “Thus, the promise gradually suffered an adjustment and was transferred to an eschatological fulfillment. This hope for a future deliverer became known as the messianic expectation that found fulfillment in the person of Christ.”²⁸

²⁵ D.J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*, 18

²⁶ D.J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*, 19

²⁷ Cf. “Incarnation”, in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of The Bible*, 60

²⁸ Cf. <http://doctor.claudemariottini.com/2008/09/messianic-expectation.html>

1.3 The Mystery of Christ in the New Testament

1.3.1 The Mystery of the Incarnation

In our modern world thinking, it is difficult to conceive the incarnation, that is God entering human history to save it rather than staying in his omnipotent sphere wherever he is to save it through a mighty action. In this same sense, Rene Latourelle says about modern man that,

He wants to be convinced that God has really entered history, and that Christ is really the manifestation of this God in human flesh. For if faith is complete surrender of the self to God, it is not an abdication of the self into unconsciousness, leaving man deprived of his nature so that he has to fall back on fideism, unable to establish the human rightness of his choice²⁹

The crucial question here is how we can explain the incarnation in a reasonable, coherent and acceptable way? And is it necessary for me as a believer to be able to give the reason why I believe? To this question, the answer is yes because it is part of the requirement of a faithful catholic. “Always be ready to make a defense to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you, and make it with modesty and respect.”³⁰ To the first question, the answer is also yes but cannot be fully met here due to the limits of the length of this paper. Moreover, “there are mysteries which cannot be known unless they are revealed, and that even when they are revealed and received in faith, they remain obscure in some way.”³¹ What is however crucial to mention, according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, is that the Scriptures show the importance of the incarnation and

²⁹ R.LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Sign of Salvation*, 4

³⁰Cf. J.O. LEO - T.S. HOWLAND, *Faithful Witness: Foundations of Theology for Today's Church*, 14

³¹Cf. “Mystery” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 691

logically links it to the passion of Christ. “The Logos, who needed no exaltation, took this form and suffered death in the flesh on our account as man, in order that he might offer himself for us in death to the Father, and raise us up with him to those heights which from all eternity were his.”³² The coherent unfolding of the events of Jesus` identity in his ministry in the four Gospels, especially in Mark, also attests this purpose of the incarnation to reveal God.

1. 3.2 The Ministry of Jesus as Sign of Revelation of God

To me the best starting point in Jesus ministry is first, Jesus` attitude, his words, his teaching and his wonderful acts. These qualify Jesus as a prophet, teacher and savior or liberator. This ministry of Christ is where we can best see how he reveals God in himself as he reveals his will and the way man should follow.

As a prophet, Jesus is a religious figure who mediates God, God`s word, and God`s will. Jesus preached the kingdom of God, and in the name of God Jesus confronted ideas and practices that were in place, preached reversals of commonly accepted ways of doing things, criticized religious institutions, and confronted people with a message from God.³³

By these same acts, Jesus defeats the law and shows himself as its perfection (Rm3:20) as he invites man to imitate him to be saved. Looking broadly at Jesus` ministry, more than his teaching, the signs of revelation are many. “These signs- miracles, prophecies, the message itself, the presence of holiness, the resurrection of

³² H.U.V. BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale*, 25

³³ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 61

Christ-are for man motives of credibility.”³⁴ This means that only to God are given the conditions of the possibility to perform such acts, so Christ plays his role as prophet, that is, to reveal God’s will. Christ, at the same time, reveals man to himself by not only taking human flesh in the incarnation even though he was God (Phil 2: 5-11), but also by showing him the way to follow through concrete examples. “Christ is God’s representative, not as a mere prophet or human Messiah, but in virtue of being the Father’s Son, sharing with the Father Wisdom and Power and Love. Hence Christ’s miracles are the works of the Son as they are the works of the Father.”³⁵ This equals to saying that the same way the Father raises the dead, so does the Son (Jn 5:21). And since these mighty acts are performed among human beings, consequently they see God in the Son’s acts. In a mysterious contrasting way, Jesus inaugurates God’s kingdom. “As Jesus conceived it, the kingdom of God is a radically superworldly entity that stands in diametric opposition to this world.”³⁶ “All the partial signs (miracles, prophecies, message, holiness, resurrection) can be understood only if they are referred to Christ who addresses them to us: they are the manifestation of his being in its divinity.”³⁷ Be Jesus` tragic final end an accident or not, it remains a logical result of what his ministry has been in the context of the society he lived in.

1.3.3 Passion, Death and Resurrection

Jacques Dupuis helps us to understand the crucial importance of the paschal event known, in other words, as the Christ event in salvation history as we defined it in

³⁴ R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Sign of Salvation*, 5

³⁵ R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Sign of Salvation*, 11

³⁶ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 60

³⁷ R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Sign of Salvation*, 11

the introduction. “The Jesus Christ event is the decisive event of salvation history—the pivot, we might say, upon which the entire history of the dialogue between God and humanity turns, the principle of intelligibility of the divine plan as concretized in the history of the world.”³⁸ However, we should still ask ourselves why this event is so important and how can we understand or perceive its importance? To respond to this question, the Second Vatican Council’s pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world considers the reality of human condition today in our society and enumerates a few aspects in the following statement. There is suffering, evil, death despite all the wonderful achievements of human intelligence. There is also a worry about what will happen after this earthly life. The ultimate answer is in Jesus Christ. “The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all, can show man the way and strengthen him through the Spirit in order to be worthy of his destiny: nor is there any other name under heaven given among men by which they can be saved” (GS 10). Moreover, the passion and death of Jesus, according to Jurgen Moltmann involves three necessary dimensions. “Moltmann has pointed out that we cannot do adequate justice to the death of Jesus unless we interpret it on three levels: the religious, the political and the theological.”³⁹ By this he means that at the religious level, Jesus by being accused of blasphemy did not die as martyr or hero but as an accursed person as Saint Paul says (Gal 13:12). This joins the idea of Saint Paul that we confess a crucified Christ, a scandal for Jews and foolishness for Gentiles (1Cor 1:23). On the political level, the death of Jesus is a confrontation of two sources of authority that is of

³⁸ J. DUPUIS, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 116

³⁹ J.J. O’Donnell, *The Mystery of Triune God*, 60

Caesar and of Christ. By rising again, Christ showed illusory Pilate's power. The third and most important level is the theological one. He says that the cross can only be grasped adequately if it is seen as an event which is the working out in history of a primordial drama between the Father and the Son who from eternity risk their being on one another, who are thus distinct but yet one in the Holy Spirit who is their bond of communion.⁴⁰

As far as the resurrection is concerned, Roger Haight links it with salvation. "The resurrection of Jesus and human reception of the revelation of this resurrection together make up an integral and essential part of God's salvation as understood by Christians."⁴¹ If we were to ask ourselves the question how this salvation happens practically to believers, for a response we have to look into the seven sacraments of the Church as the place of the economy of Christ's presence as God's full self-revelation. The sacraments are the best place and means through which this saving experience of Christ can happen. We shall come back to this in the second part of this chapter. For now let us see how this ministry of Jesus was the Word of a Trinitarian God.

1.3.4 The Trinity

Here we need to know what would be necessary to consider the most important while reflecting on the Trinity with the aim of establishing a Christian-Muslim dialogue. In this sense, O'Donnell suggests a response in his following statement. "Anyone reflecting on the mystery of God today within the tradition of Catholic

⁴⁰Cf. J.J. O'DONNELL, *The Mystery of Triune God*, 66

⁴¹ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 147

theology will have to take into account two major developments.”⁴² By this, John O’Donnell meant that we should consider the Catholic Church’s understanding of revelation in its Trinitarian dimension during the period of time between Vatican I and Vatican II. This is a necessary step to understanding Christology and Trinitarian theology today because of the new perspectives of looking at these theologies. So, in the first place I want to show what Christology is today and how it is related to Trinitarian theology. Second, I will show the importance of the theology of the Spirit in connection with Christology in the continuous work of salvation of Christ. And in the third place I will look at the problems that the theology and doctrine of trinity face today. Let us start with the first point that is the relationship between Christology and the Trinity.

“It is frequently said that the doctrine of the Trinity is the very centre of Christian faith and belief. But such claims might also be made for the Christological doctrine. Perhaps the doctrine of Christ lies at the centre of a Trinitarian vision and further defines that centre.”⁴³ In this same line Raimon Panikkar brings out the centrality of the figure of Christ not only for Christianity but for other religions. “From an intercultural and interreligious perspective, the key question of the entire Christians tradition centers on the figure of Christ. The other religions ask Christianity, ‘Who is Christ’.[...]. ‘Christology’ is the word, over fifteen centuries old, with which theological reflection refers to the mystery of Christ.”⁴⁴ What is the mystery of Christ? “This is the mystery of Christ: the interpenetration, the *perichoresis* (*circumincessio* in Latin), as the

⁴² J.J. O’DONNELL, *The Mystery of Triune God*, 17

⁴³ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 468

⁴⁴ R. PANIKKAR, *Chistophany, The Fullness of Man*, 3

church fathers would say, between the divine and the human, without forgetting that within the human there also exists the cosmic, as Jesus` entire speech here attests.”⁴⁵ This speech is the counsel to Christians to remain in Jesus (1Jn 2:28). Generally speaking, as already mentioned, the mystery of Christ is in the statement that he revealed God and his will for humanity by revealing humanity to itself, and that Christ suffered, died and rose again to accomplish this will of God. To better understand and experience the mystery of Christ, there are many types of Christologies that we may adopt. “No one should doubt the pluralistic character of Christology today, even within a single church.”⁴⁶ The Christology I prefer to adopt is three-fold. First is transcendental, “to show that Jesus Christ is precisely the fulfillment of the human, this Christology begins with transcendental phenomenology of human existence and finds a universal inner dynamism that reaches out for absolute truth, goodness, freedom, and being.”⁴⁷ Second is narrative Christology which is also understood to be practical because it engages Christian life. This is to say that, “The way Jesus lived and acted assumes great importance in a narrative Christology.”⁴⁸ In third position comes what Haight calls existential Christology⁴⁹ which sees the point of all Christology as the encounter with God through faith that constitutes salvation. And finally, I will consider a Christology of Other Religions. “It is not a corollary to ecclesiology, missiology, or Christology; it defines the point of departure since it takes into account inculturation, other religions

⁴⁵ R. PANIKKAR, *Chistophany, The Fullness of Man*, 22

⁴⁶ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 17

⁴⁷ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 17

⁴⁸ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 18

⁴⁹ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 19

and the identity of Christianity among all this”.⁵⁰ And that Christ’s Spirit continues and perfects his work until he comes in the last day to judge all. To discuss a theology of the words that speak of Christ’s experience is known as Christology. The main concern here to have a better understanding of the language that says that Christ is the revelation of God. And Raimon Panikkar invites and encourages us to move beyond the words that speak of Christ’s experience and focus on the experience of Christ itself. So, I will adopt the method of “Trinity from Below” of Roger Haight. He says:

I entitle this discussion “Trinity from Below” in order to announce the thesis contained in it, namely, that Trinitarian theology is completely dependent upon Christology, that the doctrine was generated in the course of the development of Christology, and that, as in the case of Christology, the only way critically to understand the doctrine of the trinity is to trace its historical development.⁵¹

The reason why I prefer to adopt this method of Roger Haight is that I am convinced by his following argument. “All our thinking moves from the world to God and can never move in the opposite direction. Revelation in no way suspends this law. Revelation is the experienced self-communication of God in human history, which thereby becomes the history of salvation.”⁵² We now move to the second aspect of the Trinity that is the second point in our discussion.

The second point of discussion is about the role and scope of the Spirit in God’s revelation through Jesus. Roger Haight says that in the New Testament, there are two christologies that particularly point to God’s presence and action in Jesus’ life.

⁵⁰ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 21

⁵¹ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 471

⁵² R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 471

Spirit Christology dominates the New Testament in terms of its pervasiveness: God as Spirit encompasses Jesus' life, before, during, and after. Jesus is God's son because he was born from the power of God as Spirit, lived by the authority of God as Spirit, and was exalted in God as Spirit who then flooded the Christian communities.⁵³

This is a very good insight about the role of the Spirit because it shows the active presence of Christ in the church through the Spirit and it also shows the ways in which the Spirit continues carrying out the work of Christ. We now move to the last point of discussion that is concerning the problems facing the doctrine of the Trinitarian theology.

“Today a ‘person’ is a being, most immediately known through self-consciousness as an autonomous human being, who interacts with the world through self-transcending reflection and freedom.”⁵⁴ From this definition of the person, to me, the first and more important problem of language about the trinity is the problem of the term person. Many people, especially Muslims, wonder whether we Catholics believe in three Gods because of the contemporary understanding of the term person. On the contrary those who have this doubt should make an effort to consider the historical aspect of this language. “The doctrine of the trinity was formulated with a different ontological notion of person, and it did not mean that three conscious, free, and independent subjects made up the Godhead.”⁵⁵ A second important question is about the relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity for a Christian living. In his book *Holy Trinity*,

⁵³ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 474

⁵⁴ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 469

⁵⁵ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 469

Perfect community, Boff tells us that the Trinity is the prototype of any perfect community living since the human person is made to live in groups or community. This is what we need most in our post-modern society where individualism, capitalism and relativism are invading our societies. On this point Pope Benedict XVI says that “Society’s problems have not gotten any better, and this underscores all the more the urgency of the questions concerning the shape we should give our lives [...]. We see an unrestrained economic system ready to mutate into a predatory capitalism that devours values on a huge scale.”⁵⁶ There are more issues about the language of the doctrine of the Trinity such as modalism and subordination but we shall not deal with them since they do not have a direct relevance to this topic.

2. Living the Mystery in the Church as the Economy of the Signs of Christ

2.1 The Church as Sign of Christ

The first question we should ask ourselves to guide our reflection is, did Jesus intend the Church? The second question is what does the word economy mean? Third, what does the Second Vatican Council teach about the Church?

We find a response to the first and third questions asked above, that is about the origin of the Church according to the Second Vatican Council’s teaching. For the Second Vatican Council, “the mystery of the holy Church is already brought to light in the way it was founded. For the Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the kingdom of God, promised over the ages in the

⁵⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Light of the World, The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*, 126

scriptures[...] (Mt 1:15; Mk 4:17)”(LG 5). The document continue to explain that, after this inauguration and after he died and resurrected, Jesus poured on the disciples the Spirit promised by the Father. Consequently the Church became equipped not only with the gifts of his founder but also received the mission of establishing among all people the kingdom of Christ and of God. The most important thing to keep in mind is the following. “It is the decision to carry on the mission of Jesus` kingdom that remains the basis of the church. [...].Thus the Church is, first of all, not a matter of holding on to particular structural elements.”⁵⁷ In conclusion, this is how we can show in a coherent, intelligible and acceptable explanation the Church`s claim to be part of Christ`s mystery by being founded by him.

However, questions still rise as far as the origin and role of the church is concerned and this brings us to the second question asked above about the economy of signs of Christ in the Church. “The relationship between the historical Jesus and the Church has remained one of the greatest problems in Christian theology. So far no universally accepted solution has been found, although many answers have been proposed.”⁵⁸ There are extreme positions and one of them is given here by John Fuellenbach. “One extreme posits a direct, explicit, and deliberate act by which Jesus established a new religious organization with all its structures, seven sacraments, and hierarchy firmly in place and outlined in detail.”⁵⁹ I will not follow this rigid position as John Fuellenbach says. “The council Fathers however, were concerned with correcting a

⁵⁷ J. FUELLENBACH, *Church, Community for the Kingdom*, 34

⁵⁸ J. FUELLENBACH, *Church, Community for the Kingdom*, 28

⁵⁹ J. FUELLENBACH, *Church, Community for the Kingdom*, 28

church-image that was generally considered as being too rigid and in many ways out of touch with contemporary reality.”⁶⁰ I will rather focus on the seven sacraments as signs and symbols of the mystery of Christ’s presence in the church today.

2.2 The Sacraments, a Call to incarnate Specific Values.

To the question why the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church are so important to its faithful, we have two answers. First, part of the answer is that Christ is the supreme sacrament of God. Second is that these seven sacraments are the continuation of Christ’s work as he did during his public ministry through the power of God in the Spirit. Vorgrimler stresses this last point more clearly. “The faith conviction that Jesus is the sacrament of God is deeply rooted in the New Testament. The witness to the events of his life, his dealings with human beings, show how much he was, in his very person, a ‘sign’, a making-visible of the presence of God.”⁶¹ After Christ as the primordial sacrament, another fundamental sacrament is the Church. “If Jesus Christ is the Living One, and if, in the Holy Spirit, he continues his mission of reshaping humanity until creation is perfected, to the glory of God the Father; all this presumes an effective work of the Risen One within humanity.”⁶² As we have already shown, the Church being the body of Christ and his sign, it is also a sacrament of Christ. “If, as Vatican II says, the Church is the universal saving sacrament of Jesus Christ, the question remains how this being-a-sacrament (being-a-symbol, a sign, or an instrument)

⁶⁰ J. FUELLENBACH, *Church, Community for the Kingdom*, 36

⁶¹ H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, 30

⁶² H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, 32

is to be realized.”⁶³ It is realized and more specified in the individual sacraments. “From what has been said it is probably clear that the sacraments can be understood as fulfillments of the Church’s life or forms of the Church’s self-actualization, without detracting in the least from the sovereignty of God in communicating divine grace.”⁶⁴

For all the reasons mentioned above, we may still ask ourselves whether the sacraments needs our collaboration in order to be efficacious signs of Christ’s presence? This is where the sacraments become not only challenging to Christians but also transformative. The challenge is more portrayed in the notion of *ex opera operato*. This notion says that the efficacy of the sacraments does not depend solely on the state of grace or sinfulness of the minister but on the disposition of the recipient. From a theological perspective, this is a mystery of God in Christ that cannot be challenged. However, this is easily challenged in the pastoral field. The reason is that many of the faithful’s disposition of faith and readiness to receive any of the seven sacraments in the Church to transform their lives depends a lot on how they appreciate the ethical and moral life of the minister. A little story can help us grasp better what I mean. A deacon shared during a class on “*Hebrews and the theology of priesthood*” that during his pastoral experience he lived in a parish. One day, a police officer came to ask him to come to his home in order to help in reconciling him with his wife. The deacon responded by telling him to go to the priest, his confrere, who seemed to be close to the police officer. However the officer replied that, that priest was not the right minister because they are companions in drinking. The officer meant implicitly that the priest

⁶³ H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, 40

⁶⁴ H. VORGRIMLER, *Sacramental Theology*, 90

was not an instrument of Christ for him. This story reminds us of the mystery of Christ's presence in the sacraments. Every sacrament despite being *ex opera operato* calls us, ministers and recipients, to live its specific value and be transformed.

Leonardo Boff in trying to explain the world as sacrament of the trinity says the following. "All creation is the work of the blessed Trinity. The Persons act on the basis of their own proper qualities so that signs of the triune God can be seen everywhere. God in God's own mystery can never be adequately represented."⁶⁵ By this, Boff means that the good functioning of our world or society is guided and sustained by three forces the same way our faith and relationship with one another is sustained by each person of the Trinity. All three are necessary. These three forces⁶⁶ are the economic power, the political and the cultural. For this reason, just as the three persons of the Trinity relate harmoniously to one another through love, the three forces of our society cannot relate to one another harmoniously without love. The importance of his argument is in the fact that a person is part of human society into which families and the Church exist and necessarily relate to. "Society is the result of three forces that always act together and continually; in these forces we can identify the traces of the Trinity."⁶⁷ In this society, human beings deal with one another through economic matters such as making a living. They also interact politically to build their society in sharing spiritual and cultural values.

⁶⁵ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 44

⁶⁶ CF. L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity Perfect Community*, 41

⁶⁷ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 41

These three forces are mingled in the building, establishment, and development of every human society. They always work together, and so the political and the cultural are with the economic, and so forth. This is just what we say of the Blessed Trinity: the three Persons are distinct, but they always act together. The interrelationship among the divine Three means that they are but one God, mirrored in our social reality.⁶⁸

It is in this line that we may better understand the core message of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical letter *Caritatis in Veritate*.

Gratuitousness is present in our lives in many different forms, which often go unrecognized because of a purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life. The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension. Sometime modern man is wrongly convinced that he is the sole author of himself, his life and society (CV 34).

Besides the seven sacraments and the specific values they incarnate, we may rightly say that the mystery of Christ's exemplary death is also active in the witness of the martyrs. "The Church has always believed that the apostles and Christ's martyrs, who gave the supreme witness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely united with us in Christ" (LG 50). In this sense martyrdom is the result of the love and Charity of Christ for others by others. We can then meaningfully say with Tertullian that the blood of the martyrs is seed for Christianity. "The Church recognizes that Catholics are not alone in giving this witness of martyrdom. For the Spirit of Christ gives strength to all his true disciples."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 42

⁶⁹ R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Signs of Salvation*, 29

3. Vatican II and Christ's Presence

3.1 Need of a New Spirit?

In the section concerning the trinity, I showed how the mystery of Christ is a dynamic of relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. The mystery of this interpenetration of the trinity does not stop here. "In addition, although the Spirit is inseparable from the living Christ, it is not subordinate to the Logos Christ. The word "christophany" appeals to the Spirit too. It is this that constitutes the capital difference between Christology and Christophany."⁷⁰ And this capital difference called christophany by Raimon Panikkar is also expressed by Paul Knitter in his "spirit Christology" but in a way that is very challenging to the traditional understanding of the mystery of Christ in the Church. "On the one hand, it [a Spirit christology] accounts for the normativity [the challenge and meaning] of Jesus for humankind generally. For Jesus empowered by God as Spirit offers a salvation that is true, universally relevant, and thus normative."⁷¹ The challenge here is that, this reality of the trinity does not prevent any possibility of Christ's salvific work through the Spirit in other religions. In this sense, Knitter continues his argument using Roger Haight's understanding of the action of the Spirit.

When Haight states that the Spirit has been, and is, operative throughout the world without a causal connection to the historical appearance of Jesus," he is not denying an essential relationship between the universal Spirit and the particular Jesus; but he is suggesting that what the Spirit is up to in the world and in other religions has a certain

⁷⁰ R. PANIKKAR, *Christophany, The Fullness of Man*, 10

⁷¹ P.F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of religions*, 154

independence of Jesus; the Spirit's agenda cannot contradict that of Jesus, but it can go beyond, or at least be really different from, that of Jesus.⁷²

To better understand and without any negative judgment the strengths and weaknesses of the Church's Christological theology, there is a need to place it in history as far as time and place are concerned.

The fact is that Christology has been developed only within the framework of the Western world. Despite its Trinitarian soul, Christology has not really freed itself from the monotheism it inherited from the abrahamic tradition. Let it be clear, however, that it is not a question of either supplanting traditional Christology or of forgetting the tradition from which Christianity was born. What we need to do is to revisit the experience of the mystery of Christ in the light of our times-to recognize the *kairos* of the present, even though our need does not spring from an anxiety to be up-to-date.⁷³

To respond to this important need, Raimon Panikkar proposes a "Christophany" that goes beyond traditional Christology. Panikkar gives us the reason why Christophany is necessary. "Christophany simply intends to offer an image of Christ that all people are capable of believing in, especially those contemporaries who, while wishing to remain open and tolerant, think they have no need of either diluting their "Christianity" or of damaging their fidelity to Christ."⁷⁴ However, Panikkar warns against any misuse of this word Christophany which is by the way a Christian word. "This Christophany, however, should be very cautious so as not to repeat the old error in which religions have constantly been engaged-cultural and nationalistic manipulation

⁷² P.F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of religions*, 155

⁷³ R. PANIKKAR, *Christophany, The Fullness of Man*, 7

⁷⁴ R. PANIKKAR, *Christophany, The Fullness of Man*, 9

of the divine as in the phrase *Gott mit uns* (God is with us).”⁷⁵ This reminds me of a Catholic priest who said about Muslim-Christian dialogue that we should not fight to show that God is on our side, but rather strive to be on the side of God. “Christophany, takes nothing away from Christology but is open to the reality of the Spirit, which, without separating logos from *pneuma*, does not subordinate the latter to the former. Neither is it a ‘pneuma-logy’, but it receives the Spirit’s presence and action in a different form- the form of the third eye.”⁷⁶ This is my main idea and aim behind this project of finding the presence of God through Christ in Islam. “If Christology focuses on the doctrines that are developed on the basis of the words that speak of the experience of Jesus, christophany is the opening of the third eye, which brings one in touch with the experience that Christological doctrines refer to.”⁷⁷ Now an important question follows. Is this the direction in which the Second Vatican Council moved when it made the following statement? “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslim; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day” (LG 16). If so, it is left to theologians to fully explain it as seems to be in the book, *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue* on commenting on *Dominus Iesus*? “People of other religions have the possibility of salvation in Christ by

⁷⁵ R. PANIKKAR, *Christophany, The Fullness of Man*, 9

⁷⁶ R. PANIKKAR, *Christophany, The Fullness of Man*, 10

⁷⁷ R. PANIKKAR, *Christophany, The Fullness of Man*, viii

the special salvific grace of God ‘in ways known to Himself (God)’. Theologians are seeking to understand how to explain these ‘ways’ more fully.”⁷⁸

3.2 Vatican II and its Theology of Dialogue

The Second Vatican Council’s most authoritative teaching on revelation is from its dogmatic constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum*.

“It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9). His will was that men and women should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2Pet 1:4)”(DV 2). In its following lines, it continues to explain that the most ultimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation (DV 2). This declaration about Revelation and Jesus is further explained in relation with the role of the Church to it by the same Council.

Finally, those who have not yet received the gospel are related to the People of God in various ways. [...]. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day (LG 16).

From this statement, we have hope that the need of the new spirit in Christology as I have shown through the argument of Panikkar may become real. However, there is still a need to throw some more light on some of the Council’s declarations about the

⁷⁸ C.D. ISIZOH, ed., *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue*, xxii

role of the Church as Latourelle puts it. “To pose the problem of the signs of revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ is equivalent to posing a problem of interpretation, to posing indeed the first and most important problem of Christian hermeneutics, that of the very meaning of Christianity.”⁷⁹ This statement brings up clearly the role of the Church in the formulation of dogmas and their interpretation through Church teachings. The Church teaches that Christ is fully revealed in the Church. The light on this issue can be found in the Council’s declaration on the relation between the Church and Non-Christian religions.

The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke (NA 3).

In this same line, Paul Knitter explains that Christ’s saving action does not consist in fixing something but showing something. Can we show Christ’s presence in Islam from what the Qur’an and *hadith* say about him or should we look somewhere else? “What the council had to say about other religious believers is contained mainly and most boldly in its Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*[NA]).”⁸⁰ This document with reference to Muslims, while not

⁷⁹ R. LATOURELLE, *Christ and the Church, Signs of Salvation*, 3

⁸⁰ P.F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 75

elaborating ways in which dialogue should be carried out, at least suggests concrete areas where from which to start.

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 (NA 3).

From the above analysis of the Second Vatican Council's documents, one important remark is to be made. The documents of the Council show how necessary a Christian dialogue with Muslims presents itself. However, as a Muslim said, the Council never mentioned in its reference to Islam either the Qur'an or their prophet Muhammad. The question here is why this failure of the Council while there are Qur'an texts about Jesus, his mother and his disciples? Does this attitude compromise from the beginning any effort at dialogue? Knitter says that the Council made two exceptions in its texts about Islam. First he says: "To the satisfaction of many, the council did not take up Rahner's notion of other believers as 'anonymous Christians.' It was too controversial among Christians, too uncomfortable for non-Christians."⁸¹ This was on one hand. On the other hand another exception was made. "But to the disappointment of others, the Council did not follow Rahner in expressly concluding that the religions are to be viewed as possible, or probable, 'ways of salvation'-instruments by which God

⁸¹ P.F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 76

draws people to God's self."⁸² With these remarks of Knitter, can we say that there is still a way forward?

Conclusion

“A theology that is written in and for a postmodern intellectual culture cannot begin with the doctrine of the trinity. [...] It thus summarizes what is in essence a narrative theology of God dealing with the world.”⁸³ This is what I tried to show in this chapter starting right from the Patriarchs. They had to struggle to discover the unknown one God (Acts 17: 23) who created the world, yet it is the same God himself who called Abraham (Gn 12:1-4). The same happened with Jesus whose identity was not discovered as such until the resurrection despite his presence in his community through his mighty deeds, preaching and way of life. All that happened in the person of Jesus was possible through the Spirit with the purpose to reveal the one God, the Father. Until today, Christ's presence remains a mystery in the Church as an instrument of the kingdom and in the sacraments as the economy of his saving power worked out through the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the mystery of Christ's presence manifested in its Trinitarian dimension continues to be the source of all theological reflections in the Church and controversies and quarrels between Christianity and Islam. However, I believe that Christ who revealed this mystery yet to be discovered more and more, is also present in Islam. I borrowed Christophany, the idea of Raimon Panikkar to show that the mystery of God's presence in Jesus challenges us through the work of the Holy Spirit which

⁸² P.F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 77

⁸³ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 490

without contradicting that of Christ, may be independent from it. One of these challenges is to find how Christ is present in Islam from what Muslims believe Christ to be. Finding out this will help us to connect with the Christian belief of who Christ is for both Christians and Muslim in order to engage in constructive dialogue for peaceful relations.

CHAPTER II

The Presence of Christ in Islam

Introduction

In this chapter, my aim is to show that the presence of the mystery of Christ in Islam is a reality. However challenging this may be, from my reading and two years experience with Muslims in Khartoum, I believe that Christ's presence in both religions remains the foundation of any Christian-Muslim dialogue for peace. On this point, Zahniser quotes a Sheikh as follows: "According to a saying of Muhammad, connecting the one Source to the many cultural contexts of prophethood, 'The Prophets are brothers of one father, their mothers are each different but their religion is one.'"⁸⁴

Now from this significant statement follows a number of significant questions. If Christianity and Islam are one religion of different mothers, can they agree on the nature of Jesus and the meaning of his actions? Hans Kung affirms that "compared with the triune God of the Christians, the God of the Muslims is indeed a God without mystery; or, rather, his mystery lies not in his nature, but in his actions, in the unfathomable way by which he directs humanity or has made certain things obligatory

⁸⁴ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 2

through his law.”⁸⁵ However, with the attributes of Jesus as portrayed in the Qur`an, what is, if it exists at all, the extreme line limit between divine action and that of Christ? If Jesus is not a divine being, to what extent can God endow a human being with his power of action? In this sense, with Hans Kung we may ask: Do the actions of God not reveal his profound nature since some actions are only reserved to a divine nature? Lastly, what would be a Christian view about all this in the line of Christian faith and theology? To be able to handle these questions, we need to go to the Qur`an, the *hadiths* and contemporary Muslim interpretation of the attributes of Jesus. For this reason, this chapter will comprise two main parts.

In the first part, I will focus on the significant sayings of the Qur`an about Jesus. To do so, I will start by first making a brief but significant connection between the patriarchs and their faith in the God from whom Islam believes that Jesus was sent to the world as an exceptional messenger. This aims at comparing the origin of Christianity and Islam with Jesus as the central figure. Then, about the death and resurrection of Jesus, I will refer to the so called ‘denial and affirmation verses’ of the Qur`an as portraying the most challenging presence of the mystery of Christ in Islam. How could this constitute also a challenge to Christianity?

In the second part of this chapter, I will show that, despite the doctrinal barriers between Islam and Christianity, there is way forward for a society of peaceful Christian-Muslim relation. To do so, I will base myself on my pastoral experience of two years in Khartoum, Sudan. This will allow me to show that the *hadith* and *shari`ah* are resources

⁸⁵ H. KUNG, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 70

not only for interpreting the meaning of the Qur`an but also for experiencing the Christ of Christianity and Islam in common social values. For now, let us find out how what the Qur`an says about Jesus` identity and his mission.

1. Christ`s Presence in the Qur`an

1.1 Some Precisions

The Qur`anic texts that will be referred to here are of high importance for two reasons according to Maurice Borrmans.⁸⁶ The first is that these texts are the same that are used and quoted always and everywhere by Muslims in writings, preaching and conferences. The second reason is that these texts are officially accredited by the Islamic body for preaching which is under the Arab League.⁸⁷ Not taking things for granted, Borrmans reminds us that among the 114 chapters or *surah*, the words, Jesus, Messiah, Mary, Gospel and Christians, are repeated twenty five times, eleven times, thirty four times, twelve times, and fourteen times respectively. This already gives us a hint of how important Jesus is in Islam. To situate ourselves in time and space, it is useful in this section to state briefly, when, how, why and to whom the Qur`an was revealed.

“The Muslim authorities were as uncertain as we are about which of the revelations recorded in the Quran was the earliest received by the Prophet, and which, if any, of the early *surah* describe the actual experience of revelation.”⁸⁸ From this it is clear that Muhammad was the one to whom the Qur`an was revealed. Other sources tell

⁸⁶ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d`Aujourd`hui*, 19

⁸⁷ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d`Aujourd`hui*, 19

⁸⁸ Cf. F.E.PETERS, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, 147

us that “Muhammad was born in Mecca around 570.”⁸⁹ Regarding how and when the Qur`an was revealed to Muhammad, Jacques Jomier gives us his findings. “Around 610 he went on a long retreat in a cave on Mount Hira, some miles from Mecca, right in the desert. There he had a dream. Other traditions speak of a vision during a vigil. He saw a superhuman being who ordered him to recite a text and called him the Messenger of God (*rasul Allah*).”⁹⁰ This text being the first of the Qur`anic revelation was to say a lot about the action of God, his will for human beings and, in our case, about Jesus. Unfortunately, apparently the text does not go in that direction as we can read the revealed text. “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, recite in the name of your Lord who created, created man form clots of blood! Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who by the pen taught man what he did not know.”⁹¹ After some other events and visions, others texts were given to Muhammad and later constituted the Qur`an. “Muslims regard the texts thus proclaimed as messages coming from God through the ministry of the angel Gabriel. Committed to memory, [...] they were finally brought together some years after the death of Muhammad and form the Qur`an, the holy book of the Muslims.”⁹² Now we see how Jesus is in line with the faith of the patriarchs and the prophets.

1.2 Jesus in the Genealogy of the Patriarchs

About the link between the Patriarchs and Jesus, as far as revelation is concerned, the Qur`an is clear in its statement. “We have sent thee inspiration, as we

⁸⁹ J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 8

⁹⁰ J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 9

⁹¹ J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 9

⁹² J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 9

sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham. Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon and to David we gave.”(S 4:163). As one may notice, the Qur`an shows that the same revelation made to the patriarchs and prophets is the same sent to Jesus so that he may reveal it to humanity. The chronological order here differs from the Bible, however, the most important thing is the link between Jesus and the Patriarchs in the process of revelation here translated as inspiration. It is in this sense that Barker says the following. “Before one can appreciate Jesus in the Qur`an one must grasp the central witness of Qur`anic faith: the oneness and transcendence of God. Muslims trace this witness back to Abraham and see it uniting the greatest prophets in the world`s faiths.”⁹³ Having clarified this important starting point, we can now move to see what the most significant Qur`anic verses say about Jesus.

1.3 Jesus in the Most Significant Qur`anic Texts

We should remind ourselves of the meaning of the mystery of revelation according to Islam. That is, according to Hans Kung, as I already quoted above, God reveals not his mystery about his nature but about his will through his actions and the obligations that these actions imply for humanity. Maurice Borrmans explains this in a different way in French that I translate into English:

In fact, when God decides to speak to human beings to signify his will, as Muslims believe, or to reveal some aspects of his own mystery, as Christians believe, he relies on

⁹³ G.A. BARKER, *Jesus in the World`s Faiths : Leading Thinkers from Five Religions Reflect on His Meaning*, 142

prophets as his mediators or mediations that he sends and uses their language as they participate in created human realities and in divine light of the creator.⁹⁴

Here, the mystery of Christ in the Qur`an is, as we shall discover step by step, the fact that the Qur`an uses the same key words of the bible but does not give them the same meaning. A good example is well shown in Gonzales Montes` idea. "To say that Islamic monotheism is anti-Trinitarian is insufficient, even given that this implies the rejection of Christ`s divinity."⁹⁵ This significant negation of the trinity has a crucial consequence on Christ`s divinity and his mission as we can read. "What is prior is the idea of God implied by the revelatory mission of Muhammad, which makes plain the theological nature of this monotheism as something incompatible with two Christian concepts implicit in the notion of revelation, incarnation and redemption."⁹⁶ To perceive more clearly the mystery of the presence of Christ in the Qur`an, we should ask ourselves the following question. If the Qur`an denies the trinity, the identity of Christ and his mission as Christians perceive it, what are the attributes it gives him so that we can still reasonably say that there is a mystery of Christ`s presence in Islam? With this question, let us move to see the most significant attributes accorded to Jesus from the incarnation to the controversial issue of his death and resurrection in the denial and affirmation verses.

It is said of Mary that she became pregnant of a child (S 19:22) through the annunciation by the angel Gabriel. Strangely enough Jesus started speaking right from

⁹⁴ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d`Aujourd`hui*, 236

⁹⁵ H. KUNG, - J. MOLTMANN, *Islam : A Challenge for Christianity*, 68

⁹⁶ H. KUNG, - J. MOLTMANN, *Islam : A Challenge for Christianity*, 68

the time of his birth and this is reported in Qur`an, and Jesus says: “And peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I will die, and the day when I will be resurrected” (S 19:33). From this verse Borrmans makes an important remark about Jesus. Jesus is the only prophet in the Qur`an who bestows peace upon himself and therefore this verse maybe the most mysterious verse of the Qur`an.⁹⁷ From this follows an important question. What could this blessing of Jesus upon himself reveal about his identity according to the Qur`an, right from his birth?

The Qur`an speaks about Mary`s virginity and the Holy Spirit. “Behold! The angel said: “O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee-chosen thee above the women of all nations (S 3: 42). In another chapter, this idea is continued as we can read. “And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and we breathed into (her body) of our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of his Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants)” (S 66:12). Further, the revelation to Mary continues about Jesus as word and Messiah.

Behold! The angel said: O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah, “He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous (S 3:45-46).

From here we go to the ministry of Jesus. What does the Qur`an say about the ministry of Jesus in line of God`s revealing actions? The mission of Christ is said to be only in line with the Patriarchs and the prophets, which is to maintain the one and

⁹⁷ Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d'Aujourd'hui*, 235

undivided religion (S 42:13). This religion, explains the same *surah* and another, is that God is one and has no associate (S 112:1-4). “Jesus` miracles are explicitly acknowledged; but he works them not as God`s Son, but with God`s permission.”⁹⁸ This is more visible in the following verses. “And appoint him a messenger to the children of Israel, (with the message): I have come to you, with a sign from your Lord, [...]. And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I bring the dead into life” (S 3: 49). From this verse, for a Christian it seems as if the Qur`an was reporting Jesus affirming his divinity and his messianic mission as awaited for in the messianic expectation (Lk 4:17-22). In this passage of the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus reads the scroll from the prophet Isaiah which says that the year of liberation of the Lord promised is accomplished in Jesus. This is seemingly the same expressed by Jesus in the following *surah*. “(I have come to you), To attest the Torah which was before me and to make lawful to you part of what was (Before) forbidden to you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. So fear Allah and obey me” (S 3:50).

In the second *surah* known as the Cow (*Al-Baqara*), the Qur`an speaks about Jesus, his relatives and the Christians⁹⁹ It says that among the messengers, God favored some more than others. Jesus is among those favored. “To Jesus the son of Mary we gave clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit”(S 2:253). Here, the Qur`an affirms the importance of the Gospel for all humanity. “It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah (of Moses) and the Gospel (Of Jesus)”(S 3: 3-4). The verses continue to say that

⁹⁸ H. KUNG, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 98

⁹⁹ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d`Aujourd`hui*, 26

those who reject faith and the signs of Allah will suffer the severest chastisement. This, in a certain way, joins John's Gospel where Jesus, the light who came among his own people, was not received (Jn 1:11).

What about the Trinity? This is where the controversy gets more dramatic according to Maurice Borrmans.¹⁰⁰ Here we remember S 112:1-4 that says, that God does not beget neither is he begotten. And to those Christians who believe in the trinity, the Qur'an makes an inadequate claim that even the ordinary Christian will notice does not correspond to the Christian conception of trinity. "And behold! Allah will say: O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, "take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? He will say: glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say)" (S 5:116). Naturally, the Qur'an in the verse addressed to the Christians accuses them of exaggerating the truth about Allah.

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: or say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah and his word, which He bestowed on Mary and a Spirit preceding from Him: so believe in Allah and his messengers. Say not 'Three': desist: It will be better for you: [...] (Far exalted is he) above having a son! (S 4:171).

Mathias Zahniser sums up for us all the above Qur'anic texts concerning Jesus as follows: "Indeed the Qur'an gives great attention to Jesus. It refers to him as the son of Mary because of his virgin birth, as the Messiah, as a messenger or God, as a prophet, as word from God, and as a spirit from God."¹⁰¹ This is a very positive Qur'anic

¹⁰⁰ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d'Aujourd'hui*, 32

¹⁰¹ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 7

view of Jesus` identity, yet it still falls short of the Christian belief. However, the most controversial view of the Qur`an is in what Christian conceive as center of their faith.

The Jesus Christ event is the decisive event of salvation history- the pivot, we might say, upon which the entire history of the dialogue between God and humanity turns, the principle of intelligibility of the divine plan as concretized in the history of the world. Well does Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, number 10, say that the key, the centre, and the end of all human history is found in Jesus Christ.¹⁰²

The negation of this central faith profession of Christianity is expressed in what Mathias Zahniser calls the denial and affirmation verses about Jesus` death on the cross and his resurrection.

1.3.1 The Denial Verses

The denial verse simply means a verse of the Qur`an that denies Jesus` death as we can read in the following verse. "That they said (in boast), 'we killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah'; but they killed him not, nor crucified him. Only a likeness of that was shown to them" (S 4:157). Mathias Zahniser explains that the subject '*they*' used here for those who claim to have killed Jesus refers to the people of the book (S 4:153) which could mean the Jews or the Christians.¹⁰³ Here we agree with Zahniser that we are confronted with the problem of getting to the real meaning of this denial verse. Zahniser states the problem in his own observation. "In this passage one of the most important questions is, what does '*but so it was made to appear to them*' mean? The verse suggests that the Jews honestly thought that they had crucified

¹⁰² J. DUPUIS, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 116

¹⁰³ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 15

Jesus. [...]. The words ‘*but so it was made to appear to them*’ (*wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*) turn out to be ambiguous.”¹⁰⁴ Here there is a big problem because neither the subject nor agent who “made it to appear to the Jews”, nor the object “that was made to appear” is specified by the Qur`an. Since the issue is about Jesus` crucifixion, a messenger of God, in this context can we guess that the subject is God and the object is Christ? The answer is no. This is further explained by Mathias Zahniser. “The Qur`an leaves the agent of the *making-like* completely unknown. Since Arabic has no neuter gender, every noun being either masculine or feminine, the agent would not even have to be a person.”¹⁰⁵

Another idea about the *making-like* is given by Kung. “The Jews took the wrong person and instead of Jesus executed someone else, Judas perhaps, as later exegesis proposed.”¹⁰⁶ If that was the case, who can make the Jews to be mistaken on such an important matter? Why should the Jews boast that they killed the messenger of Allah? Did they mean that Jesus could not have been the Messiah since they have killed him? Against this claim of the Jews, “the Qur`an does not upbraid them for killing Jesus in the way it upbraids them for slandering Mary and for killing the messengers in defiance of right. It upbraids them for claiming to have killed him.”¹⁰⁷ What would be their motivation in making such a claim? This is also another mystery on the part of Islam because the Qur`an does not give a clear reason that motivated the such a claim. “Verse 158 says that, in contrast to the Jewish claim to have killed Jesus, God raised him up-

¹⁰⁴ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 16

¹⁰⁵ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 16

¹⁰⁶ H. KUNG, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 98

¹⁰⁷ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 19

not specifically in the sense of resurrection from the dead but in the general sense of exaltation, or ascension.”¹⁰⁸ Even so, let us try a little bit of reasoning. It is known that at that time, the Jews did not believe in resurrection. And since they boasted that they killed him, it would really mean that Jesus was killed in the real sense that he could not rise again. If it is so, then the Qur`an by affirming that Jesus was raised, is affirming that Jesus resurrected in the real sense of the word. “This last passage contains the real surprise for Christian readers: Jesus is so closely modeled on Muhammad that the crucifixion is denied.”¹⁰⁹

There is another unanswered important question that rises from the denial verse. It is from an affirmation made by the same *surah*. “And those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge. But only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not” (S 4:157). The question that rises from here is: Who are the people who differ or doubt and why should they doubt? “The answer to this question remains obscure if we rely upon the Qur`an itself.”¹¹⁰

From a Muslim perspective, those whom the Qur`an accuses of differing among themselves are believed to be only Christians. In this sense, Zahniser reports that Yusuf Ali in his book, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur`an*, supports this view. “A. Yusuf Ali thinks so, although he admits that the whole issue is shrouded in mystery.”¹¹¹ Another Muslim group known as Ahamadiyya gives us a different version of the story. “Contrary to the other Muslims, they accept that Jesus was really nailed to the cross, but

¹⁰⁸ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 19

¹⁰⁹ H. KUNG, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 98

¹¹⁰ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 17

¹¹¹ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 17

claim that he was still alive when he came down from it. He recovered, and left for Kashmir in northern India where he preached, died and was buried.”¹¹² As we said in the beginning, the Qur`an was revealed in different contexts. In this case of the denial verse, going back to the context may shed more light on the origin of the revelation of this verse. “We can solve the mystery in part by examining the denial verse in its Qur`anic contexts.”¹¹³ This context, according to M. Zahniser, is that the Jews challenged Muhammad`s claim of having received a book sent down from heaven. In response to this, Muhammad identifies acts that the Jews committed which displeased God, and they are reprimanded for that in the verse of the chapter that denies Jesus` crucifixion. Other unanswered questions still remain.

Now, what would be a Christian interpretation of this denial verse? Contrary to the Muslim view, it is interpreted that those who differ on whether Jesus was crucified or not were not only Christians among themselves. This point of view is shared by Richard Bell`s *Commentary on the Qur`an* here quoted by Zahniser: “this may indicate that those who differ are the Jews, the Christians, and possibly even the Muslims.”¹¹⁴ This Christian perspective is shared by other Christian scholars in the following statement: “based on its immediate context. Some Christian interpreters have been able to read verse 157 not as a denial of the cross of Jesus *per se*, but strictly as a denial of a Jewish claim to have defeated him.”¹¹⁵ However, so far, all the interpretations we have referred to go in line a strict denial of the cross. We have another interpretation that

¹¹² J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 98

¹¹³ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 17

¹¹⁴ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 17

¹¹⁵ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 17

appears to be balanced and geared toward Christian-Muslim dialogue. “W.Montgomery Watt, one of the principal European interpreters of Islam, sums up what can be said about this verse. [...]. The point to be insisted on here is that the Qur`an is not attacking Christianity, but rather defending it against Jewish attack.”¹¹⁶ However, the question is still why the whole chapter on this important polemic about Jesus` death does not give it any explanation. “In addition, no other passages in the Qur`an deals with the issue of Jesus` death and the Christian convictions about its meaning. [...]. It would seem that if the Qur`an had any quarrel with Christian teaching about the death of Jesus, it would have shown up in this *surah*.”¹¹⁷ This is the mystery of Christ`s presence that the denial verse offers us. What about the affirmation verse?

1.3.2 The Affirmation Verse

Now, let us look at what the affirmation verse offers us as statement and what possible interpretation can be made out of it? “One of the most important passages in the Qur`an for understanding what Muslims believe about how Jesus` mission ended occurs in *Family of Imran* [3]:42-55.”¹¹⁸ What does the affirmative verse say?

“Behold! Allah said: “O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the day of Resurrection: then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matter wherein ye dispute.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ A. H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 20

¹¹⁷ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 23

¹¹⁸ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 23

¹¹⁹ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 23

Zahniser explains that the common but controversial understanding of this verse is that it means “I will cause you to die” but some contemporary interpretations refuse this.

Muslim interpreters of the Qur`an, both Sunni and Shi`i, have generally found in the affirmation verse not only a denial of the humiliating crucifixion of Jesus but also a denial that he died. Some interpreters, in contrast, have discovered in the affirmation verse a Qur`anic affirmation of the death of Jesus and even of his crucifixion.¹²⁰

In the spirit of a better Muslim-Christian understanding of the end of Jesus` mission, two modern interpreters, a Muslim and a Christian, affirm that *Family of Imran*, S3:55 is an affirmation that Jesus did die by crucifixion. First, we have a Christian interpretation by Nolin who is said to have studied the Qur`an with Muslim experts and Christian pastors.¹²¹ These people wanted to have a New Testament interpretation of the affirmation verse. “According to him, Christians could consider the Qur`an a word from God, if interpreted in the light of the New Testament.”¹²² If this idea of Nolin is practical, then we can say that the mystery of Christ in Islam is a reality. This mystery is moreover seen in what Zahniser says about the Qur`an in commenting on Nolin`s idea. “Obviously, his proposal of New Testament interpretation requires an agonizing and difficult reconception for Muslims, even though, [...] the Qur`an seems to require Muhammad to consult the scriptures of Christianity for interpreting his own revelation (*Jonah* [10]:94-95 and *Prophets* [21]:7).”¹²³ What does Nolin mean concretely when he says that the Qur`an can be interpreted as word of God provided it

¹²⁰ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 24

¹²¹ Cf. A.H. M.ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 25

¹²² A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 25

¹²³ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 25

is done in the light of the New Testament? Is this possible? Zahniser gives us what is Nolin`s response to this in the following. ““Read in agreement with those earlier scriptures, the Qur`anic evidence is seen to point most naturally to the death of Jesus on the cross, not his rescue from it.””¹²⁴ In this sense, Zahniser, commenting on Nolin`s argument, concludes: “After all, Nolin points out the Quran testifies to the death of Jesus in *Mary* [19]:33, a passage revealed before *Family of Imran* [3]:55.”¹²⁵ The *surah* known as the *Cow* [2]:87 testifies to Nolin`s interpretation of Jesus` real death.

Now let us explore the positive interpretation of the affirmation verse given by Mahmmod Ayoub. “It gives evidence of flexibility in interpreting the last events of Jesus` mission. He concludes that *Family of Imran* [3]:55 “O Jesus! I will take thee/cause thee to die and raise thee to Myself”, indicates Jesus did die.”¹²⁶ Referring to Ayoub, Zahniser says,

He also examines carefully the views of Sunni, Shi`i, and Sufi exegetes on the subject of the death, or the supposed death, of the Messiah Jesus from an interfaith perspective: “The ultimate aim of this study”, he says, “is to promote constructive and meaningful dialogue among the men and women of faith in [the Muslims and the Christian] communities.”¹²⁷

For this reason, Ayoub underlines for us four important aspects that contributed to the ambiguity of the verses we are discussing. The first is due to the human condition itself. “Thus the Qur`an presents Jesus as a challenge not only to human folly and

¹²⁴ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 25

¹²⁵ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 25

¹²⁶ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 26

¹²⁷ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 26

unbelief (*kufr*) but equally to human ignorance and reliance on mere conjecture.”¹²⁸ This reminds us of what Saint Paul qualifies as the wisdom of the cross, a scandal for Jews and folly for Gentiles (1Cor 1:23). Second, Ayoub rejects the idea that someone was made to look like Jesus. His argument is that since God is always consistent in his covenant with humans, how can he keep this consistency if he made someone to look like Jesus? In the third place, Ayoub makes a very important statement as far as the Christian mystery is concerned. “He is convinced that Table [5]:117 and *Family of Imran* [3]55 indicate that God brought an end to Jesus’ life on earth which was followed by a celestial life with God, and that these verses stress the ‘Oneness of God’ (*tawhid*).”¹²⁹ In the fourth place, Ayoub brings forward some Qur’anic evidence that Islam and the Qur’an have a place for a positive view of the mystery of suffering of his messengers. “In addition to its portrayal of the distraught Jacob over the loss of his son, the suffering of Job, Abraham, Zechariah, and John the Baptist, the Qur’an shows Muhammad suffering agony and depression under the burden of this divine mission.”¹³⁰ And finally, Ayoub makes a critique of one Qur’anic statement that gave a wrong genealogy to Mary mother of Jesus considering her as sister of Aaron as we can read. “Finally, Ayoub maintains that statements about Mary’s being the sister of Aaron (Mary [19]:27-28), the statements about Jesus’ death, or supposed death (and all other

¹²⁸ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 27

¹²⁹ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 27

¹³⁰ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 27

statements about him), have to be taken theologically in the broadest sense. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was not the sister of Aaron.”¹³¹

From this analysis, it is clear that what is important is that at least we have solid grounds to affirm that the mystery of Christ`s presence in Islam is real. What is also important is that no matter how and for what purpose, both Islam and Christianity accept that God raised Jesus from the humiliation of the cross. And the purpose of this divine action is to defeat Evil that rose against his divine plan. So, what matters is God`s triumph not human triumph. This reminds us of the aim of this project that is not to pretend that God is on my side but to strive to be on the side of God. This triumph of God is also the purpose of the two, a Christian and a Muslim, who undertook to analyze the verses.

Both Nolin, a Christian, and Ayoub, a Muslim, offer an alternative to the dominant Muslim interpretation of the affirmation verse. Both look at it in relation to the denial verse. Both interpret the affirmation and the denial verses with primarily allegiance to the Prophetic Tradition (*hadith*) and traditional Qur`an exegesis (*tafsir*). Both believe the Qur`an affirms Jesus` death. Both find in it divine triumph over human evil. Both offer their findings for Christian-Muslim dialogue.¹³²

It is exactly in the triumph of God`s messenger, Jesus, that both Islam and Christianity face the challenge of the mystery of Christ.

For Islam, then, as for all “Abrahamic” faiths, it is the truth that makes one free. On a certain level of abstraction, this truth is identical for Christianity, Judaism and Islam alike—the ultimate reality of the one God, profound in his uniqueness and simplicity.

¹³¹ A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 28

¹³² A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 28

From another perspective, however, the Christian version of monotheism is different enough from the Muslim and Jewish models to pose a serious contradiction.¹³³

The above study aimed at analyzing Christ's presence in Islam in its most significant Qur`anic texts especially in the denial and the affirmative verses. We may have realized that it brought us more questions about the nature of Jesus and the purpose of his actions than it brought us answers. For this reason we cannot fail to retain some challenges that this questions put to both Christianity and Islam.

1.4 Challenges

We start with the challenges for Islam. Three areas of exceptions accorded to Jesus by the Qur`an can be considered. First is the identity of Jesus. God intervened directly in the conception of Jesus. Jesus' mother was a virgin. Jesus started speaking and prophesying right from his birth (S 2:253). Jesus was God's word (S 3:55) and made out of God's Spirit (S 19:17; 21:91; 66:12) strengthened with the Holy Spirit (S 2:87; 2:253; 5:110). "A. Merad remarks that nowhere the word flesh (*bashar*) is applied to Jesus."¹³⁴ Merad further explains that if the word flesh had been applied to Jesus' conception, it would have been the best Qur`anic argument against Jesus' divine identity. On the contrary, the Qur`an affirms that God held him in honor on earth and in the hereafter (S 3:45).

The second challenge is in the ministry of Jesus. God gave him powers that are ordinarily reserved to himself such as to create and give life to birds, to resurrect the

¹³³ H. KUNG, - J. MOLTMANN, *Islam: A Challenge for Christianity*, 64

¹³⁴ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans D`aujourd`hui*, 229

dead (cf. S 3:49; 5:110) and cured the man born blind. “All these privileges that no other prophet according to the Qur`an, was given was given to Jesus.”¹³⁵

The third challenge is in the denial verse. It is ambiguous in its way of denying Jesus` crucifixion and by affirming his elevation by God (cf. S 4:158) from what situation and for what reason. More challenging to Islam is that, the Qur`an invites Muslims, in case of any doubt about what it revealed to them, to consult those who read the book revealed earlier (cf. S10:94). However, there are challenges for Christianity also. Now we move to the challenges that Islamic monotheism puts to Christianity.

Concerning Jesus` identity right from his birth, the Qur`an puts a challenge. The Qur`an says God created Jesus just like he created Adam by saying: Be! (cf. S 3:59). “Such an assertion is in full agreement with the principle of non-contradiction. After all, if humanity itself was created by the miracle of God`s blowing life into clay, is it any more miraculous for God to infuse the same spirit into the womb of Mary?”¹³⁶ Also, Christian monotheism (cf. S 112) is seriously rejected by the Qur`an and repeated by Muslims today as Kung puts it. “Nonetheless, nowadays every Muslim will insist that with this *surah* the Trinity, too, is rejected. Even if he does not interpret it as tritheism, which often happens in the heat of controversy, he will consider it utterly superfluous. Muslims see in the Trinity a triumph of theology over scripture.”¹³⁷ This conception of strict monotheism has a direct negative consequence on the redemptive nature of Jesus` ministry and paschal mystery. “Any Christian theologian accepts that the concept of

¹³⁵ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans D`aujourd`hui*, 235

¹³⁶ H. KUNG, - J. MOLTMANN, *Islam: A Challenge for Christianity*, 65

¹³⁷ H. KUNG, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 71

redemption receives its specific content from the incarnation, the key to Chalcedonian Christology (though not *vice versa*). And it is at this point the two concepts, the one including the other, make Christianity alien to Muslim monotheism.”¹³⁸

At this point of my project of reflection on the mystery of Christ’s presence in Christianity and in Islam for a Christian-Muslim dialogue two questions need to be asked in order to determine whether it is worth continuing it or not. The first question concerns the reasons why I believe in Christian-Muslim dialogue despite all the challenges and questions the above analysis set before me. The second question is about the manner in which I think that this dialogue can be carried out practically. This second question will constitute the subject matter of my third chapter. Naturally before reaching the third chapter, I have to respond to the first question. In response to the first question I will base myself on my two-year pastoral experience in Khartoum as a starting point.

2. My Conviction of the Possibility of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.

2.1 My Experience in Khartoum

My experience through which I came to learn how Christ is present in Islam happened in two social contexts. The first one happened in the ordinary daily life activities. The second happened in one of the university’s institutes where I spent one academic year learning literary Arabic.

Let me start with the first area of my experience that is the ordinary social setup. I arrived in Khartoum in July 2006 my first Arabic speaking country. Arabic was the only language spoken at all levels of social life. The first Arabic sentence I learnt was to

¹³⁸ H. KUNG, - J. MOLTMANN, *Islam: A Challenge for Christianity*, 69

say the Muslim ritual greeting before which nobody would start a conversation for no reason: *as-salam aleikum* which means, peace be upon you. This is the very sentence Jesus after his resurrection addressed his disciples who were in state of alarm and fright (Lk 24:36). This peace we all seek either in Islam or in Christianity is in Jesus the prince of peace (S 19:33; Jn20:21). My first big impression was attending a mass celebrated in Arabic a language I was so far made to believe it belongs only to the Qur`an and Muslims. Moreover, catechesis were taught in Arabic and pastoral council meeting held in Arabic. I was always amazed in drawing the sign of the cross in Arabic especially by saying: *bi-ism ab, wal ibn, wa aruhil qudus al ilahi wahd amin*. This means: in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God, amen! Later I was able and comfortable in saying: *bi-ismi-Allahi, ar-rahmani, ar-rahim* which means in the name of God Most Gracious, Most Merciful (cf. S 1:1). Before my experience in Khartoum I believe that saying Muslims blessing was a curse for a Christian. This is my first steps in discovering that God I believe in also hears Arabic.

More importantly I discovered Christ in many other experiences outside the daily ordinary social context that is at the institute of language in the university. Among the many experiences I had, I choose a few to share here. The university was a former strict Islamic institute reserved for Muslims only. For my admission, I had to explicitly inform the registration office that I was a Christian since they could suspect me of being a spy. I was granted permission. I was very happy but fearful as well since only the office knew that I was a Christian. When I started the classes, one question loomed always in my head and always increased my fear. How would my class mates and lecturers react once they discovered that I am a Christian who is not willing to convert

to Islam? To make myself confident, in preparation to face any challenge, I tried to ask myself the craziest questions I could imagine they might ask me, to which I tried to find an adequate answer.

One day during Qur`an class, the teacher would randomly ask anybody to recite a part or the whole of a chapter (*surah*) that he himself chooses since most of the students had memorized the *Qur`an* before coming to learn the language. By chance he asked me to recite one *surah* which I did not know, and then he asked me two other different ones which I did not know either. Finally he asked me to recite *surah al-Faatiha* which would be like the *Our Father* for a Catholic. To his big surprise I did not know this one either. He asked me then: do you pray? To this, I kept quiet because I experienced some Muslims saying Christians do not pray, so if I answered yes, for them, I am saying that I am a Muslim and if I said no, I am confirming their thought that Christians do not pray as sooner or later they will know I am a Christian. He continued: do you go to the mosque? I kept quiet still because answering no would be a scandal or an attitude of lack of respect for them. He realized that I had decided not to answer these questions. So he finally asked me: are you a Christian? To this, my answer was yes. Then suddenly he said: Oh! I now understand. Then he said to me: let me teach you a *surah*. The chapter is called: *al-kaafirun* which means the infidels. He asked me to repeat it after him as it follows: “Say (O Muhammad): O ye who reject faith! I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will you worship that which I worship. And I will never worship that which you worship. Nor will you worship that which I worship. Unto you, is your religion and unto me is my religion (Islam)” (S 109:1-5).

After this exercise, he asked volunteers who knew the meaning of the chapter to translate it into English for me since at that stage I could not understand the Arabic text. A Somali proposed himself and then for the first sentence he rather said: "O! Say you Christians". To my surprise, the whole class reacted against him, saying: "do not say Christians but say: infidels or disbelievers". Then the translator immediately apologized to me, and at the end of the class, I assured him that I have no grudge against him. In fact, according to me he had translated exactly what all the rest had in the back of their minds since for many Muslims, all other believers are infidels. I was rather astonished that the whole class reacted against his translation. However, surprisingly, they all became friendlier to me than ever before. Surely, it was with the intention to convert me. Many would invite me to the mosque for the afternoon prayer that falls before our last class of the day. If I go to the mosque even once, I would give them false hope that I may convert to Islam. So I never went to the mosque with them for prayer but at the request of some of my class mates, before touching the Qur`an, I used to take the ablutions before the *Qur`an* class for purity purposes. Some asked me why I refuse Islam since I am a learned and good person; I would be better as a Muslim. Some told me that I am a wonderful person but, unfortunately, I am lost and will be sent to hell if I do not convert before death. To defend my catholic faith, I always used the *hadith* called *al-muflis* which means the bankrupt:

The prophet (peace be upon him) asked his companions "do you know who is the bankrupt?" His companions replied": "the bankrupt among us is one who has neither money nor property." The prophet(peace be upon him) said: " the real bankrupt of my community (*ummah*) would be he who would comes on the day of resurrection with much of prayer, of fasting, and *sadaqah*; but he will find himself bankrupt on that day as he will have exhausted the funds of virtues because he reviled others, brought

calumny against others, unlawfully devoured the wealth of others, shed the blood of others, and beat others, so his virtues would be credited to the account of those who suffered at his hand, if his good deeds fall short to clear the account, their sins would be entered in his account and he would be thrown in the hellfire.¹³⁹

A second *hadith* I used to use to defend my faith is known as the *believer (al-Mu`min)* and it says:"Anybody who believes in God and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor, and anybody who believes in God and the Last Day should entertain his guest generously, and anybody who believes in God and the Last Day should talk what is good or keep quiet (i.e. abstain from all kinds of evil and dirty talk)."¹⁴⁰

With these two *hadith* I had a good foundation from Islam to defend my Catholic faith connecting to Jesus` greatest commandment in Mk 12:29-31, Mt 7:12). And this proved effective. In the end I used to tell them that this is what Christianity believes and teaches from what it received from Jesus Christ.

My second major experience was during a class of oral expression. While standing in front of the class, each student was required to introduce himself and at the end say: *wa al-hamdulillah ana Muslim*" which means, "and praise be to God, I am a Muslim". When it came to my turn, I felt a strong uneasiness that my neighbor sensed and they said to me: "do not worry, just go and introduce yourself." I introduced myself and ended in saying simply: "I am a Christian" without adding "and praise be to God" since this would sound provocative. The class became quiet. Nothing still changed in our relationship; everything went very well until the end of the studies.

¹³⁹ *Sahih Muslim*, 59- 2581

¹⁴⁰ *Sahih Al Bukhari, Vol: 8, Hadith, 47*

The third and last experience concerns a phone message (SMS) I received as a wish on Christmas day, from a Muslim, the *Burkinabe* like me who helped me register at the university and remained a good friend. The SMS was a whole but short *surah* that says: “Say: He is Allah, the One Allah, the eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him” (S 112:1-4). If a Muslim and friend sends such an SMS to his Christian friend on Christmas, the message is clear. As time went on, I started appreciating Islam and defending its positive spiritual and moral values that had great resemblance with Christianity. Most of my stereotypes about Islam disappeared and I was able to distinguish between a Muslim and Islamic teachings. This made my superiors to suspect that I would convert to Islam. So, they decided among themselves to stop me from finishing the studies. Fortunately, by the grace of God, the one who was put in charge to break the news to me never had the courage to do so until I finished studies. They only told me when they presented my pastoral report to me in the end of my stay in Khartoum. I had no intension of becoming a Muslim. I did not find anything fundamentally new in Islam faith that is not in Christianity though I admired Islam and respected it. The fundamental change that happened in me is my love for say Muslim blessings and wishes and the ability to put on a Muslim garment and a hat publicly while feeling comfortable. These are things I never thought I could do. I had many other human experiences with Moslems and Arabs. They were beautiful faith expressing experiences that marked my whole life forever.

Moreover, I could easily link all these experiences to my background experience as a child born in a Christian family from a mixed society of African Traditional Religious persons and Muslims in Burkina Faso. This was to me a unique experience

that helped and facilitated the integration of my pastoral experience into my own faith journey of seeking more understanding of the mystery of Christ in Islam.

At the end of my experience, if I were asked to judge whether there is a gap between what I now learnt about Islam at a doctrinal level and what I experienced in Khartoum, I would make Hans Kung's view my own answer. He said the following. "If one asks a Muslim about the advantage enjoyed by Islam, he will presumably stress two things: the absolute rationality of its teaching, and a certain flexibility in its practice, which he may call something like the golden mean. Both points may be contested but we would surely never define Christianity in such a way."¹⁴¹ Since my experience was unique and may not be applicable to other Christians I tried through reading to find out whether my case was an exception or anybody else can have the same experience based on Islam's values. So, I looked beyond my experience and what the Qur'an says about Jesus to see how Jesus' presence can be found in the *Hadith*, the *Shari'a* and the Muslim holy war called *Jihad*.

2.2 Jesus and the Hadith

"There are two main sources for an understanding of Islam: the Holy Qur'an and the collections of the recorded words, actions and sanctions of the Prophet Muhammad which make up the *sunnah* and which are normally referred to as *Hadith*."¹⁴² From this statement, it is clear that the *hadith* play a major role in the daily life of the Muslims' relations with Christians since the *hadith* are recorded actions of Muhammad and therefore considered as a way of life. From my experience, we saw

¹⁴¹ H. KUNG, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 107

¹⁴² I. EZZEDDIN, - D.J. DEVIES, *Al-Nawawi's , Forty Hadith*, 7

how the two hadith express Christ's love as written in Mk 12:29-31. So the *hadith* influence a great deal how Jesus is conceived in Islamic thought that is defined by what the many *Hadith* say about Jesus and his return on earth at the end of time.¹⁴³ Moreover, a certain level of knowledge of the *hadith* remains necessary even for someone who has no practical experience of Islam. "Without a study of the *Hadith* a Muslim's knowledge of his faith remains incomplete, and without it the non-Muslim is unable to form a true picture of the Islamic faith and its fundamental, spiritual, moral, legislative and cultural principles."¹⁴⁴

2.3 Shari`ah, Jihad and Jesus` teaching on Love and Self-discipline.

The first important question we need to ask ourselves is what does the *shari`ah* mean in its primary sense.

The Qur`an and *sunnah* form the principal bases of the *Shari`ah*, the Islamic way of life. Containing elements of law, but going far beyond the notion of law, the *shari`ah* indicates the totality of actions and attitudes that characterize Islamic life and society and distinguish them from that of others. Elaborated in the course of time by a subtle art of jurisprudence, the *shari`ah* covers every aspect of human life, from family relations, to the social, economic and political organization of the community.¹⁴⁵

By the fact that *Shari`ah* is not a revealed or sacred text like the Qur`an but elaborated on jurisprudence, it means that its interpretation can be adapted to different social contexts. So, in this sense, it is more a matter of how Muslims interpret it than it is of Islam's radical teaching. "Fundamentalist movements proclaim that the Qur`an is

¹⁴³ Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans D`aujourd`hui*, 14

¹⁴⁴ I. EZZEDDIN, - D.J. DEVIES, *Al-Nawawi`s , Forty Hadith*, 7

¹⁴⁵ T.F. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam*, 186

the constitution of the world.”¹⁴⁶ With this interpretation without any other consideration, the *shari`ah* becomes a dangerous source of jihad.

Jihad means to struggle to the utmost of one`s capacity. A man who exerts himself physically or mentally or spends his wealth in the way of Allah is indeed engaged in Jihad. But in the language of the *shari`ah* this word is used particularly for a war that is waged solely in the name of Allah against those who practice oppression as enemies of Islam.¹⁴⁷

This is the primary meaning of *shari`ah* and *jihad* even though their practice may differ according to different Muslim communities. Jacques Jomier is convinced the practice of *shari`ah* or of jihad depends a lot on the level of education of the Muslim believer. “There is an enormous difference between a Nigerian Muslim graduate from the University of Ibadan or Zaria and his compatriot who remains in a distant village, but both are caught up in a new system.”¹⁴⁸ Now, the question is, how can we as Christians connect this understanding with the presence of Christ in Islam?

To a Christian, to look for the presence of Christ in Islam equals to looking in it for the sacrament of God. We already showed that the best sacrament of God in Catholicism is Jesus Christ. As far as Islamic law is concerned in connection with Jesus we can refer ourselves to Mk 12:34-40. In this passage, Jesus summarized the whole law and the prophets when the Pharisees wanted to challenge him as follows: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your entire mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You

¹⁴⁶ J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 48

¹⁴⁷ S.A.A. MAWDUDI, *Towards Understanding Islam*, 73

¹⁴⁸ J. JOMIER, *How to Understand Islam*, 73

must love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:34-40). On Islam`s side, their golden rule from the *hadith* teaches, “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.”¹⁴⁹ In this sense, we see that there is difference between what is taught and what is practiced in both Islam and Catholicism. “We know, however, that announcing beliefs and living them are two different things.”¹⁵⁰ For this reason, we need to make some effort in our daily living. To do so, we need a new spirit.

Conclusion

At the end of this chapter, if I am asked the question, what is the mystery of the presence of Christ in Islam, it would take more than what is said in this chapter to answer. This simply means that Christ is present in Islam according to the will of God that surpasses our reasonable explanation. However, a simple and most significant answer exists. Christ is the sacrament of peace because he attributes to himself peace right from his birth (S 19:33). We Christians believe that he is the sacrament of this peace as himself announced it in his first public speech in the synagogue (Lk 4:17-21). This Christ, the sacrament of peace in fact became the source of hostility between Christianity and Islam as Hans Kung puts it. “Relations between Muslims and Christians have a long history of hostilities and antagonisms of all kinds.”¹⁵¹

As a Christian and missionary, I can only hope that all have heard the beautiful words of the Quran from the lips of Jesus: “I said not to them except what You commanded me-to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over

¹⁴⁹ T. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essays on Dialogue*, 1

¹⁵⁰ T. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essays on Dialogue*, 11

¹⁵¹ H. KUNG, - J. MOLTMANN, *Islam : A Challenge for Christianity*, 67

them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness” (S 5:117). This joins the greatest commandment in the understanding of Christ to “love God with all your heart, with all your strength and with all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 12:29-31). As the Bible and the Qur`an say, the right path to God and to peace between Christians and Muslims is Jesus (Jn 14:6; S42:63-64). How can we make this become a reality in our daily Christian-Muslim encounter despite the hostilities in history mentioned above by Hans Kung? This will be my topic of discussion in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

Jesus as the Foundation of Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Introduction

Considering the title of this chapter and how challenging the mystery of Christ is as we have seen in the previous two chapters, we may agree with Michael Fitzgerald and Robert Caspar in asking the following question. “Given a better understanding of the fundamentals of both Christianity and Islam, their similarities and differences, is dialogue really possible?”¹⁵² In this chapter I hope to bring a positive answer to this crucial question taking Jesus Christ as the foundation of this dialogue. As a quick reminder, the difficulty of this task is somehow expressed in the following paragraph. The idea is inspired by the opinion of the above mentioned two authors.

On one hand, Christians believe Jesus to be the Way, the Truth and the Life. This way leads to the Father. On the other hand, Muslims see the Qur`anic Isa as another Messenger, one who came to teach the truth, to show men the way; but he is

¹⁵² M. FITZGERALD – R. CASPAR, *Signs of Dialogue, Christian Encounter with Muslims*, 77

only a predecessor to Muhammad the Seal of the Prophets who brings the final definitive revelation, the Qur`an. In conclusion, for Michael Fitzgerald and Robert Caspar, for both Christianity and Islam, Jesus is a ‘sign.’¹⁵³, but the sign is perceived differently. From this short and comprehensive overview of Christ`s presence, there is a hope that a Christian-Muslim dialogue is possible. To find ways of making this dialogue become a reality, as far as I am concerned, three important steps are necessary.

In the first place, whoever and wherever we may be in the world, before any step of dialogue is taken, we should ask ourselves the following question about our surroundings. Are Muslims and Christians ready for dialogue? This will be my topic of discussion in the first part of this chapter. Secondly, the question that should follow can be stated thus: what is the concrete ground on which this dialogue can be built up so that it may stand and bring lasting peace to the communities involved? This is the second topic to be discussed. In the last and third part of this chapter, following the logic of the previous questions, the third question is as follows. Who are the partners in dialogue and what suitable approach should be used?

Moreover, it is necessary to say that I am not pretending that the plan I propose is exhaustive but I believe it has the basic requirements for successful Christian-Muslim relations. Also, by considering Jesus as the foundation of Christian-Muslim dialogue, my intention is not to force into Islam Christian truths that do not ‘exist’ in Islam. However, it is to show that dialogue is possible based on the different ways we interpret Jesus as the, or a, ‘sign’ from God. This involves challenges for Muslims as well as for

¹⁵³ M. FITZGERALD – R. CASPAR, *Signs of Dialogue, Christian Encounter with Muslims*, 141

Christians. We should willingly take the challenges as a way of being enriched by one another.

1. Are Christians and Muslims ready for Dialogue?

1.1 The Christian View

The most authoritative voice of the Catholic viewpoint concerning Christian-Muslim dialogue can be considered to be the Second Vatican Council. This view is expressed in *Nostra Aetate* which is the Council's declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions. The declaration states as follows.

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 (NA 3).

The declaration sets clearly the goals of dialogue but, based on the mystery of Christ's presence, it does not state all grounds on which this dialogue should be built up. So, it is our task to discover more possibilities of dialogue according to situations and times. In the *Nostra Aetate*, we find the fundamental expression of where this dialogue should ground itself as we can read. "The Church has also a high regard for Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth who also has spoken to men" (NA 2). This shows that the Church recognizes Islam as a worthy partner of dialogue. To show that there are more solid grounds of dialogue as well as challenges, *Nostra Aetate* referring to Christ, states the following. "Although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a

prophet, [...]. Further, they await the Day of Judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead” (NA3).

1.2 The Islamic View

“So do not faint and call for peace while you have the upper hand” (S47:35). On this point, Zahniser reports a statement of a sheikh who in addressing an audience composed of a majority of seminarians said the following.

The prophets of the Christian Bible and the Prophet of the Qur`an, Sheikh Fawzi assured us, were sent to bring people back to the true path-God`s path; to recognize the presence of God, the unity of God, and the worship of the one God; and to the recognition of prophets, angels, and eternity, or the next world. He stressed that the Specific commands of the scriptures revealed to the Heavenly Religions were different because of the differences in the times and locations of their revelation; but their core messages essentially agree.¹⁵⁴

From the media and maybe from our own life experience and aggravated by the hostilities shown by the Qur`an (S 47:35; 3:110; 9:29) in regard to Christians, the tendency may be to say that no dialogue is practically possible with Muslims and this is Bishop Bassim`s fear. However, with patience and hope, there is more to discover. Based on Bishop Bassim`s fear of the impossibility of dialogue, Fitzgerald and Caspar reassure us by stating the following: “It was stated above that the Qur`an proved the impossibility of dialogue. A Muslim writer can affirm exactly the opposite: ‘in virtue of the demands of Revelation itself the Muslim is by definition already open to dialogue.’”¹⁵⁵ Moreover, other Qur`anic references such as *Surah* 16:126; 29:46, counsel

¹⁵⁴ A. H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 1

¹⁵⁵ M. FITZGERALD – R. CASPAR, *Signs of Dialogue, Christian Encounter with Muslims*, 83

Muslims and Christians not to dispute but to believe in the one God. “The most authoritative source for Islam is the Quran. The Quran attributes to Jesus more reverential and honorific titles than to any other prophets including Muhammad. Some are more straightforward like prophet, son of Mary, and servant. Others are more enigmatic like word, spirit, and messiah.”¹⁵⁶

Moreover, a part from the appeal to the Qur`an, we have statements from Muslims such as Braswell that give us grounds to believe that Jesus is really the basis from which dialogue should start and endure considering his role in our relationship with the one God. “The traditions of folk Islam place Jesus in a role as mediator between God and humanity, as a healer, as protector against evil and as one who has power to work miracles. The traditions make Jesus accessible, more personal, and more practical to human desires and needs.”¹⁵⁷

2. Grounds of Dialogue

2.1 The Incarnation as Sign of a True and exceptional Prophethood

For both Christianity and Islam, Jesus was conceived by a Virgin, Mary through a special intervention of God himself.

Jesus` birth was announced to Mary by the Spirit, who ‘assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man’ and announced that her son would be ‘a revelation for mankind and a mercy for Us’ (S19:17-21) [...]. To describe the mystery of Jesus` origin the Qur`an employs two narratives of the Annunciation and one of the Nativity (S19:17-21; 3:42-

¹⁵⁶ G.W.J. BRASWELL, *What You Need to Know Encounter About Islam and Muslims*, 115

¹⁵⁷ G.W.J. BRASWELL, *What You Need to Know About Islam and Muslims*, 114

47; 19:22-23). For Jesus God had formed the plan to ‘teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospels’ (S3:48).¹⁵⁸

The Qur`an tells Muslims that they have the duty to believe in the prophets as Jacques Jomier puts it. “Believers, have faith in God and His Messenger, in the Book He has revealed to His Messenger, and in the scriptures He formerly revealed. He that denies God, His angels, His scriptures, His Messengers, and the Last Day, has strayed far from the truth.”¹⁵⁹ It is in this sense that in substance, Borrmans says that dialogue is possible with Muslims from the human aspect of Jesus. The reasons given by Borrmans are as follows. Jesus is the prophet of God`s love, his goodness and mercy towards men, he is a prophet of charity that the Qur`an calls goodness (*ihsan*), the seal of holiness, and model not only for Christians but also for Muslims especially those who see in him the way to the reality that is *shari`ah, Tariqa, Haqiqa*.¹⁶⁰ Islam is firm in its beliefs; one example as far as we are concerned is given by Borrmans. He says that “to accept Jesus is a fundamental pillar of Islamic faith and no Muslim can undervalue or defame Jesus or any other prophet of God.”¹⁶¹ This acceptance of Jesus` mysterious birth and his identity as a revelation from God shows that God reveals something of himself to both Christianity and Islam. Therefore, it impels us to more humility and wisdom in listening to God than in fighting to possess Jesus. This is where dialogue is necessary between the two religions through learning from the example of Jesus` human life in solidarity

¹⁵⁸ M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I*, 53

¹⁵⁹ J. JOMIER, *How to understand Islam*, 38

¹⁶⁰ Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d`Aujourd`hui*, 13

¹⁶¹ Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d`Aujourd`hui*, 57

with humanity. For Christians, the Incarnation is the Ultimate sacrament of God's solidarity with humanity through Jesus.

2.2 Jesus` Public Ministry in Solidarity with Humanity

In the Second Vatican Council's pastoral constitution of the Church in the modern world, the importance of Jesus` solidarity with humanity is well emphasized.

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men, of men who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onward towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (GS 1).

In this same line, Borrmans makes an analysis based on *Gaudium et Spes* (12) in the book *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical council for Interreligious dialogue*, and says the following. "Christians and Muslims affirm the eminent dignity of humanity. This is what constrains them to respect all human beings, defend their rights and render them service."¹⁶²

Here we can clearly see that Christ is the example of solidarity between Christians and Muslims in protecting human dignity. In other Muslim teaching manuals, Jesus is said to be confirmed in his mission as messenger and servant of God by the miracles God allowed him to work.¹⁶³ More importantly, Jesus showed his solidarity with humanity by curing the man born blind and the leper (S3:49). He raised the dead

¹⁶² M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue I*, 89

¹⁶³ Cf. M.BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d'Aujourd'hui*, 61

(S3:49; Jn11:43; Lk7:11) and fed the hungry crowd (S 5:112-115). This joins the Muslim tradition in the *Hadith*. “Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day, either speak good or keep silent, and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day, be generous to his neighbor, and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day, be generous to his guest.”¹⁶⁴ In this tradition, even though recognized as having originated from Muhammad, Jesus was the primary example of human solidarity through the work of his miracles. This can be rightly thought as a symbol of the Trinitarian relation that Jesus lived among men in the society in order to teach them to practice divine love.

2.3 The Trinitarian Model of a Perfect Community

As already mentioned above, a perfect community is not a community without difficulties but a community that lives its difficulties with love of all members without distinction of religious and social status. In this sense, how can the Trinity be a meeting point of Christian-Muslim dialogue? In his book, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, Boff explains that “for one who looks intently, society is a powerful sign of the Blessed Trinity in history.”¹⁶⁵ The reason is that the society is built and stands on three forces that are comparable to the Trinity. The three forces, referred to as powers, are the social, economic and cultural and without them relating with one another no society can exist.

These three forces are mingled in the building, establishment, and development of every human society. They all work together, and so the political and the cultural are within the economic, and so forth. This is just what we say of the Blessed Trinity; the three

¹⁶⁴ AN-NAWAWI, *Forty Hadith*, 60

¹⁶⁵ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 41

Persons are distinct, but they always act together. The interrelationship among the divine Three means that they are but one God, mirrored in our social reality.¹⁶⁶

To understand the necessity of these forces in relation to the Trinity, one should be true a believer who sees that a human person depends on society. “Human persons do not live solely in themselves, in the depths of their individual mystery, nor are they simply born from a family as an expression of love between husband and wife. A person is part of human society, into which both person and family are set.”¹⁶⁷ Another point to consider is that religious belief plays a major role in handling the three forces in the society. These three forces in the society have played a major role in the history of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Thus the reasons of conflicts that marred the Christian-Muslim relationship in history, are economic and political ones.

It was not theology but concrete political, economic and social considerations that determined the form and outcome of such an attitude. However, because the Qur`an recognizes Christianity as genuinely a true faith and Christians as a legitimate faith community, Christianity has survive in the Muslim world in a variety of forms and expressions that the West could not tolerate.¹⁶⁸

So, Christians and Muslims would make a more peaceful society or a perfect community in Boff’s words, if only we could imitate the relationship that exists in the life of the Blessed Trinity. Nowadays, our modern world tends to rely solely on advanced technologies. However, in many instances these technologies in their nature

¹⁶⁶ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 43

¹⁶⁷ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 41

¹⁶⁸ I.A. OMAR, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity, Essays on Dialogue by Mahmmoud Ayoub*, 42

and more importantly the ends for which they are used seem not to promote or are even against human relations as our faith requires. Consequently, there is no hope for peace unless we are guided by God and live in communion with him through the example of Jesus in the Spirit.

The divine agency of sanctification through guidance and healing, which Christians know as the Holy Spirit and which Muslims know as God's guidance, *huda* is not affected by our science and technology. On the contrary, unless our science and technology are guided by this divine agency, and thus sanctified by being dedicated to the service of God in His world, the dreaded conflagration of a nuclear war becomes inevitable.¹⁶⁹

Here the symbol of the Trinity as doctrinally expressed by the Church cannot be the direct foundation of dialogue. It is rather the impact that those who believe in it show that will validate its importance as far as dialogue on this doctrine is concerned. By this I mean that if a Christian live in practice what believing in the Trinity really implies as Boff explains it, then a Muslim will be touched and respond positively to the values that this belief has practically shown.

2.4 What Sign is Jesus for Christians and Muslims?

“Islam is the only religion, outside Christianity, where Jesus is again really present.”¹⁷⁰ These words of Hasan Askari express his firm conviction. He goes on to give the reason why he believes so basing himself on the Qur`an. He says, “In Islam Jesus is the ‘Word of God’ and ‘a spirit from Him’ (S 4:171) and is revered highly as a

¹⁶⁹ I.A. OMAR, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity, Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*, 77

¹⁷⁰ G.A. BARKER, *Jesus in the World's Faiths : Leading Thinkers from Five Religions Reflect on His Meaning*, 142

unique Apostle and sign of God.”¹⁷¹ If Jesus is a sign, what does that sign signify and what does it call for? In the Qur`an, Jesus is also conceived as a sign of the hour as we can read. “And (Jesus) shall be a sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the Hour, but follow ye me: this is a straight way (S 43:61).” From this Qur`anic text it is clear that Jesus is the sign that will stand either for or against Christians and Muslims when the time of accounting to God arrives. This is confirmed in another verse that goes as follows. “When Jesus came with clear signs, he said: ‘Now have I come to you with wisdom, and in order to make clear to you some of the (points) on which ye dispute: therefore fear Allah and obey me’. ‘For Allah, he is my Lord and your Lord: so worship ye him: this is a straight way’” (S 43:63-64).

For Christians a sign leads to reality that is different from the sign itself. However, in the case of Christ, he was not only the sign but at the same time the symbol and the reality itself which himself represented in his human nature. This is why Saint John says in his Gospel that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are already judged because they did not believe in God (Jn 3:18). However, Christians know that Muslims do not consider Jesus to be God Himself. For this reason, the question that follows is: how can Jesus be the foundation of Christian-Muslim dialogue in all impartiality? Before any attempt to respond to this question, we should consider the fact that Christ instead of being the basis of Christian-Muslim dialogue; he was rather the source of conflict. Considering this, dialogue should consist in moving from claim to strife. Since all accept that a sign`s purpose is to lead to God, therefore there is no need claiming to

¹⁷¹ G.A. BARKER, *Jesus in the World`s Faiths : Leading Thinkers from Five Religions Reflect on His Meaning*, 142

own it and making it private property or teaching the other what the sign is. Rather, it is striving to live deeply what the sign means for one`s faith. In this case, impressed by the other`s faith, one would in dialogue ask to learn from the other the deeper meaning of the sign that is Christ. The Qur`an illustrates this attitude very well for Muslims in a kind of exhortation. “If you doubt what We have revealed to you, ask those who have read the scripture before you” (S 10:94). The Qur`an addresses the same exhortation to Christians even though here it sounds like an accusation. “O people of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger making clear to you much of what you used to conceal of the Scripture and overlooking much. There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear book” (S 5, 15). In this line, Borrmans makes an important remark that is at the same time a call to dialogue on other aspects of Christ`s life as a sign for Christians and Muslims.

Whatever is the ultimate identity that Muslims and Christians give to Christ, son of Mary, and it is on this point that they differ deeply, it is not less true that he appears to both as having a particular relation with the mystery of the word and the process of its transmission: he belongs to their spiritual heritage and cannot be a stranger to them.¹⁷²

After having made this observation, we may agree with Borrmans to conclude with the following remark that is, at the same time, a call addressed to both Christians and Muslims. “It is therefore wishful that in the reciprocal respect of the identity they recognize in him be a source of reciprocal enrichment as far as are concerned the values of faith and submission, love and sacrifice, of which he remains the witness and symbol

¹⁷² M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d`Aujourd`hui*, 237

for many.”¹⁷³ In this particular moment we are interested in the value of holiness embodied by Jesus.

2.5 Jesus as the Call to Holiness

What is the definition of holiness that is applicable to Christianity and to Islam? The meaning of holiness here emanates from what both Christians and Muslims believe Jesus to be as we discussed in the previous section.

Holiness is liberation, and if we seek earnestly to know the truth, the truth shall set us free (Jn 8:32). The truth, or *al-haqq*, is God. Thus, to know the truth is to know God. But to know God truly is to walk in his ways, the ways of peace, holiness, and righteousness. To know God is to participate in His holiness through prayer, enjoining the good and dissuading from evil, sharing God’s merciful gifts with the needy and seeking the pleasure of God and his mercy.¹⁷⁴

This definition of holiness by Omar goes hand in hand with the Second Vatican Council’s view of holiness as defined in *Nostra Aetate* since Christians and Muslims worship the same one living God through prayer and it is the same God who sanctifies. Jesus was born without sin in order to become our example of life in great humility as it is here described.

Such is the extraordinary description of the person of Jesus in the Qur’an. He is ‘Messiah Jesus, son of Mary’ (S4:157), both prophet and messenger, a ‘faultless’ ‘slave of Allah’” (S19:19, 30), who could say that God ‘hath made me blessed...and (hath made me) dutiful toward her who bore me, and hath not made me arrogant, noblest’ (S4:173).¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d’Aujourd’hui*, 237

¹⁷⁴ I.A. OMAR, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 77

¹⁷⁵ M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Interreligious Documents I*, 54

In the Catholic Church the aspiration for holiness is derived not only from the Old Testament practice but more importantly from the early Church's practice based on Jesus' call to live holiness. "The source and model of holiness for both the individual and society is God, who alone is absolutely holy."¹⁷⁶ As we have seen so far, there are differences between Christianity and Islam regarding belief in Christ. Most often each tends to overemphasize the differences at the expense of the similarities. In the spirit of dialogue, we are rather called to change our vision of things and be appreciative as Borrmans puts it.

These differences notwithstanding, Christians should consider positively the degree to which the figure of Jesus in the Qur'an provides a striking analogy with the affirmations of their Scriptures, and they should welcome the great interest which Muslims show, even at the present time, in the person of the Messiah, the holiness of his life and the sublimity of his messages.¹⁷⁷

Another thorny question that follows is redemption. Does Islam know about this doctrine and does it link it to the last judgment at the time of resurrection? How do Muslims see the role of Jesus in achieving their final happiness?

2.6 Is Jesus a Savior for Both Muslims and Christians?

Here we are confronted with the most crucial question of this reflection. How do Muslims believe they are saved in link with the mystery of Christ? Is Islam a religion of salvation based on God's grace and human works? And if so, what is the role of Christ?

¹⁷⁶ I.A. OMAR, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 73

¹⁷⁷ M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Interreligious Documents I*, 55

One thing is certain about Islam; many Muslim scholars agree and have shown that the idea of Original sin does not exist in Islam. For this reason, there is no need of redemption through Christ as we read. “Furthermore, Islam does not identify with the Christian conviction that man needs to be redeemed.”¹⁷⁸ In this case the question of how Muslims are saved in link with Christ is a major challenge. “The mission that God gave to Jesus was not to save by means of total redemption through a bloody sacrifice but to save by means of an exemplary disciplined life in awakening up the sleeping spirits and in softening the hardened hearts in view of implanting the real religion of God and restoring the precedent revelations.”¹⁷⁹ Here we can refer to the Sermon on the Mount as a crucial meeting point between a Catholic understanding of the mystery of Christ’s salvific work and the exceptional prophetic role given to Christ in the Qur’an (CCC 1965).

Confronted with this challenge, we would agree with Haight that our modern age requires from us a new language in explaining the events of Christ’s redemptive mission. Haight in his book, *Jesus, Symbol of God* explains this necessity as follows.

Salvation today has to address the foundational experience of bewilderment at the ultimate meaning of existence. Of the evil that characterizes human existence, of the moral failure in one’s own person existence, and of the finitude that is never secure, but is only diminished through suffering and with time, and culminates in the apparent annihilation that is death.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ B.D.KATEREGGA, - D.W.Shenk, *Islam and Christianity, A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*, 141

¹⁷⁹ Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Jésus et les Musulmans d’Aujourd’hui*, 57

¹⁸⁰ R.HAIGHT, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 354

From this explanation of what salvation consists, the end result is that on the one hand, salvation or redemption in the Christian sense should avoid being only a theoretical idea of humanity being freed from Adam`s sin. Rather it should address the contemporary obstacles that prevent us from being in communion with one another and with God. This is the purpose of Christ`s mission. Dialogue consists in making this become reality. In this case not only Christians need Christ as example, Muslims too need him. On the other hand, salvation should not be awaited until the end of time but should be lived here and now as Christians and Muslims struggle together.

Haight affirms this point. “Salvation must be something that can also be experienced now. Salvation has to be formulated as a symbol pointing to a reality that is existentially actualized in a person`s life.”¹⁸¹ This is the Muslims` belief also since they believe that the way we live as free and happy human beings in this life is sign of actual God`s blessing which is also a sign of a promising future eternal happiness and freedom. If Christ does not save only by redeeming from “original sin”, then how does he save? This is crucial to a Christian-Muslim dialogue if it needs to be based on the meaning of Christ`s redemptive mission. In this sense Latourelle in commenting the role of Christ in *Redemptoris Hominis* says. “Is he really the one who alone can give meaning to our lives and an answer to our cries for help (in loneliness, otherness, suffering, evil, death)? Can he bring light into the depths within us and solve the riddle we are to ourselves?”¹⁸² To find an adequate answer to this question while bringing

¹⁸¹ R.HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 355

¹⁸² R. LATOURELLE – R. FISICHELLA, ed., “*Redemptoris Hominis*” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 815

together Christianity and Islam without discarding Christ's salvific mission, we should go back to the concrete life example of Jesus.

Jesus as a person is not something static, or an abstract or notional symbol. [...] Jesus reveals by means of his living a human life, through his teaching and his actions. This means that the teachings, the actions, the valuations, the healings, the confrontational sayings, the acts of hospitality, all of these actions together are what give substance to Jesus. It is that concrete life that focuses the attention and fixes the imagination of the one approaching Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁸³

This Jesus is the Jesus both Christianity and Islam can agree to be playing a salvific act in the believer's life. The Qur'an does not cease to show that Jesus was without sin (S 19:19) and probably that is the reason why God gave him the triumph over the humiliation of the cross by raising him up. If so, for the Muslims as well as for the Christian, Jesus is the way to follow in order to be saved. This is where personal works become important for salvation to take place. In this sense we perfectly understand why the Christian doctrine of justification insists that to be saved, we need not only to be infused with God's grace but we need to cooperate through faith shown in our good works of love of neighbor. In this same sense we may consider the Islamic *hadith* on the necessity of good works for salvation. The *hadith* is reported by Muslim as follows. "A man asked the Messenger of Allah (may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): Do you think that if I perform the obligatory prayers, fast in Ramadan,

¹⁸³ R. HAIGHT, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 358

treat as lawful that which is lawful and treat as forbidden that which is forbidden, and do nothing further, I shall enter Paradise? He said: Yes.”¹⁸⁴

In this sense, the importance of good works in Islam cannot be overemphasized and it is more explicitly expressed in another *hadith* known as *al-Muflis*, or the bankrupt. This *hadith* has been already quoted fully in my sharing of pastoral experience in Khartoum. However, for a quick reminder, it says that one whose good deeds are found less in the Day of Judgment will not be admitted to paradise. In Muslim belief, good works are done through acts of love and justice as mentioned in the above *hadith*. In this sense, the *hadith* can be interpreted as repeating Jesus` teaching on what is the greatest commandment that is love of God and of neighbor (Mt 12:29-31).

However, salvation is not solely limited either to Christ`s redemptive act of the crucifixion or to good works but to God`s infinite grace through faith in Jesus (S2:3; Rm3:28; Eph2:8). In this sense, the act of submission of Jesus as Christians perceive it is significant to the core nature and meaning of Islam as we shall see in the following section.

2. 7 God`s Wisdom and Jesus` Submission

The first question we need to ask ourselves is the following. Does submission have any religious significance for Christianity and for Islam? Is Jesus the symbol of submission for both religions? To respond to this let us start with Christianity. “The Arabic verbal noun *islam* indicates the act of submission or surrender to the sovereignty of the one God and his will. A good illustration of this primary, underlying meaning of

¹⁸⁴ “Hadith 22” in *Forty Hadith, An-Nawawi*, 76

Islam occurs at Q 2:130-32 [...].”¹⁸⁵ This text expresses the essential meaning of Islam not only in the sense of submission but also the striving against any force of evil to gain purity and peace with oneself and in the society. This is the core meaning of *Jihad*¹⁸⁶. At times, *jihad* is divided into two types, the little and the great. The little is a battle against one’s attackers in holy war. The great is a self purification by fighting any evil spirit in oneself. A Qur`anic interpretation adds a third type that is a fight against the devil.

For Christian faith, submission has a capital significance. Agreeing with Troll, one would say that a Christian who understood the deep meaning of Philippians 2:6-1 and has read this Qur`anic verse on the meaning of *Islam* would necessarily ask the following question. “In response to these words of the Qur`an, Christians will ultimately want to ask: Who has lived out such *islam* more perfectly than the nonviolent, crucified Jesus of Nazareth?”¹⁸⁷ And the Qur`an says that Jesus understood himself to be a servant or slave of God (S 19:30).

We may remember that in the second chapter of this reflection I showed how a few Muslim scholars agree with Ayoub’s interpretation based on the Qur`an that Jesus did die even though it does not explain either by crucifixion or no. Moreover, Ayoub gives more explanation on how Jesus’ death was the result of suffering. “Human beings are presented in these passages about the last days of Jesus as suffering, conjecturing, enduring ambiguity, and exercising arrogance. Thus, ‘the Qur`an presents Jesus as a

¹⁸⁵ C.W. TROLL, *Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*, 34

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *Encyclopedia of Religion*

¹⁸⁷ C.W. TROLL, *clarity in christian-muslim relations*, 34

challenge not only to human folly and unbelief (*kufr*) but equally to human ignorance and reliance on mere conjecture.”¹⁸⁸ The interpretation of Ayoub is of capital importance for two reasons. First, it is based on the affirmation of the Qur`an itself (S 3:55) and it has in mind a Christian-Muslim dialogue. Second, it takes into account the exegesis of the major Muslim groups¹⁸⁹ which are the *Sunni*, *Shi`i* and *Sufi*. From this capital interpretation of Jesus` last hours of his life on earth which preceded his elevation to heaven, we can join the Christian theological and capital interpretation of Hebrew 5:7-10. This Biblical passage is a fundamental text about Jesus` role of mediation, and the meaning of common and ministerial priesthood in the Catholic Church without which Church life would be without any communion with God. The communion here referred to is the transformation that Jesus requires of all who believe in him. So Christians and Muslims are invited to undertake the great *jihad* I mentioned above. In the midst of both Christian and Muslim life and the struggle to be transformed stands Jesus as the sign of the hour (S 43:61) for Muslims and the mediator of Christians. If Jesus is a perfect example of submission to God for both Christians and Muslims, then should we logically accept interconversion as a consequence?

2. 8 Interconversion: the Challenge of Christ`s presence.

Jesus said: “Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather in with me throws away” (Mt 12:30). From what we have argued so far, can we say that Muslims are against Christ or against us Christians in their belief? For a better understanding of Jesus` statement let us examine the following theory.

¹⁸⁸ A.H. M.ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 27

¹⁸⁹ Cf. A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 27

There is a popular theory that a society's health depends on the unanimous acceptance of the same values by all its members and, in particular, on a common religious faith. History provides many examples of how societies, both Christian and Muslims in obedience to this theory, have sought to preserve their homogeneity by every means, including force.¹⁹⁰

Here too, we are confronted with another serious obstacle in Christian-Muslim relations. The first important thing to do here as mentioned in *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue*, is to define the key terms of dialogue. "In order to avoid any ambiguity in its interpretation DP is careful to define the terms it is using. Attention is paid to the following terms: evangelization, dialogue, proclamation, conversion, religion and religious traditions."¹⁹¹ In our particular case we are interested in the terms *dialogue* and *proclamation*. Substantially, the document defines dialogue¹⁹² first as a purely and interpersonal human reality communication and communion. Then dialogue is seen as an attitude of respect and friendship that characterize all activities of the Church. The document finally defines dialogue in terms of all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities in view of mutual understanding and enrichment. This leads us to the definition of the second important word that is *proclamation*

"Proclamation is understood as the communication of the Gospel message. It includes, however, an invitation to faith in Jesus Christ and entry through baptism into

¹⁹⁰ J.M. GAUDEUL, *Called from Islam to Christ, Why Muslims become Christians*, 17

¹⁹¹ C.D. ISIZOH, ed., *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue, A Reading of Selected Catholic Church Documents on Relations with People of Other Religions*, 212

¹⁹² Cf. C.D. ISIZOH, ed., *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue, A Reading of Selected Catholic Church Documents on Relations with People of Other Religions*, 211

the Church (cf. DP 10).”¹⁹³ Proclamation is to be understood in the light of the meaning given to the term *Conversion* as it is defined as follows.

This leads to a note on the twofold meaning of conversion: as a change of heart, or a general movement toward God, or as a change of religious allegiance, in particular the move to embrace the Christian faith (cf. DP11). This distinction is of capital importance. Interreligious dialogue has as its goal conversion in the first sense, although it is recognized that a change of allegiance may take place and the right of the individual to change religions must be energetically defended as an integral part of religious freedom.¹⁹⁴

After the definition of these three key words, according to me it is necessary that one makes a critique which does not consist in separating the terminologies showing that one does not necessarily depend on the other otherwise we contradict ourselves.

On the one hand we have dialogue and proclamation that should be distinguished from one another for the reason that once my Christian identity is known to a Muslim partner in dialogue; he/she considers me as such in whatever action I take. Consequently my actions will speak on my behalf, so there is no separation between dialogue and proclamation. However, there is a distinction to be made between dialogue and proclamation because not all faith issues can be discussed with Muslims in every encounter. This is necessary to avoid religious fanaticism.

On the other hand, there should be a distinction between *dialogue-proclamation* and *conversion*. The distinction to be made is at the same time a big challenge to the Catholic view of the goal of interreligious dialogue in the way it is represented in

¹⁹³ C.D. ISIZOH, ed., *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue, A Reading of Selected Catholic Church Documents on Relations with People of Other Religions*, 212

¹⁹⁴ C.D. ISIZOH, ed., *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue, A Reading of Selected Catholic Church Documents on Relations with People of Other Religions*, 212

Dialogue and Proclamation. First, even though dialogue is an attitude of friendship shown with respect in any relationships with Muslims, proclamation does not exclude an invitation of faith in Christ and entry through baptism into the Church (DP 10). Legally we may not be found guilty of offending the partner's freedom but morally yes. Secondly, if conversion is the goal, Muslim-Christian dialogue loses its sense of being a 'purely human reality or experience as the document says. A good example is the interview of Pope Benedict XVI with the journalist which was initiated by him who did not believe in Christ, but resulted in his conversion to Christ. In the case of Islam, to me a real dialogue done in a real respect of human freedom should allow a two way conversion. The reason is that, if Christians are to be the best sacraments of Christ, then the conversion will be a one-way traffic from Islam to Christianity. Jesus said, "It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognize you as my disciples" (Jn 13:35). This does not depend on our intention but on our life witness as Christian and the method of witness used.

3. Methods and Partners in Dialogue

3.1 Dialogue of Life

From the different challenges elaborated concerning the mystery of Christ's presence in the Catholic Church and in Islam, one might be tempted to conclude that if dialogue is possible then it is the domain of a few. These few may be theologians, academicians or highly educated people. However, "We cannot restrict the encounter between Christians and Muslims to circles of specialists or to visits by the leaders of communities. Dialogue includes all aspects of life and can be found in every place

where Muslims and Christians live and work together, love, suffer, and die.”¹⁹⁵ This is my view in discussing Christian-Muslim dialogue as I share the opinion of Thomas Michel. “Yet, if interfaith dialogue is to affect the way religious believers regard one another and live together, this dialogue must reach the ‘the roots,’ that is, ordinary believers without formal religious or academic training.”¹⁹⁶ This kind of dialogue is the commonest and needed in human relations in general and in particular in Christian-Muslim relations. It has no criteria but it is defined by the time, the place and the partner and the need that is presented to us. “For most Christians, that form of shared life to which we are called is often termed the ‘dialogue of life.’”¹⁹⁷ In this case one may still be worried about where to start from and how to proceed. The means needed in the dialogue of life is very simple yet so essential that it always depends on the person who is engaged or wants to engage themselves in dialogue. “It is enough to be people of faith and hope, of good will and practical charity. In that way all are called to dialogue, since all are taught by God and confronted by His Spirit.”¹⁹⁸

Another important aspect of this type of dialogue that should be considered is the cultural dimension of the society or of the people. Experience shows that culture is important and Thomas Michel shares with us his conviction. “One thing that I have learned in the course of time is that interreligious dialogue or, more specifically, Muslim-Christian dialogue, must never be separated from dialogue with cultures and,

¹⁹⁵ M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I, 29*

¹⁹⁶ T.F. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam. Essays on Dialogue, 33*

¹⁹⁷ T.F. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essays on Dialogue, 19*

¹⁹⁸ M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I, 29*

even more importantly, form the centrality of ongoing dialogue with the poor.”¹⁹⁹ However, there are many other ways of dialoguing and I would like to mention two more that appear to be more important according to me.

3.2 Special Occasion Dialogue

This type of dialogue is mainly defined by the time. A person of good will may read the signs of time and take advantage of a particular situation to dialogue. The reason is the following. “Muslims share with Christians the neighborhood, school, workplace, hospital ward, and even burial ground. They share all the moral and social problems as well as the amenities of modern urban living.”²⁰⁰ For example during my stay in Khartoum, our neighbors and friends used to invite us for different occasions such as child naming ceremonies, weddings, visits to the sick in hospitals and even burials. It was challenging to pray on such occasions starting with the sign of the cross but I used to do it and I could see positive and negative reactions around me. The purpose here is mutual support and witness to one`s faith values by doing something. “In such circumstances the Spirit of God can remove many barriers between people and make them realize the essential ties that bind them together; the ties of faith in God. In the midst of an indifferent or unbelieving world they thus bear witness together to God and to humanity.”²⁰¹ Moreover, a special occasion dialogue can also be in any unforeseen encounter where one should not hide one`s faith but avoid showing proselytism. “Opportunities for encountering people of other faiths must become an

¹⁹⁹ T.F. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essays on Dialogue*, 70

²⁰⁰ I.A. OMAR, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 67

²⁰¹ M. BORRMANS, ed., *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I*, 31

integral part of religious education if we hope to build within our own communities a ‘culture of dialogue.’”²⁰²

3.3 Dialogue of Beliefs

This type of dialogue resembles the dialogue of life but at the same time differs from it. It is similar in the sense that it concerns the immediate neighbor. However, it is different in the sense that it involves intellectual discussions. We find further explication in the following statement.

Here are examined briefly the variety of ‘forms’ which dialogue can take. Most common is the informal encounter of neighbors, such as the World council of Churches has called ‘living in dialogue’ and which often precedes any kind of theological discussion. There are organized regional or international meetings; and of a different nature, there is the work of written discussion and the development of ideas. All these forms of dialogue are important in the world of today.²⁰³

This is the most challenging type of Christian-Muslim dialogue because, one even before starting can already guess what the other partner’s answer or repost would be. This discourages many who conclude easily that there is no possibility of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Conclusion

Christian-Muslim dialogue is possible and encouraged by the sacred texts of both religions as we have seen. This dialogue is possible at all levels even though, not all believers of both religions accept or encourage it. But for those who believe in

²⁰² T.F.MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essays on Dialogue*, 35

²⁰³ M. FITZGERALD – R. CASPAR, *Signs of Dialogue, Christian Encounter with Muslims*, 78

dialogue as a necessary way to peace among Christians and Muslims it is necessary to take up the challenge. This challenge is of different types but I prefer to mention three that I think are the most basic without which we cannot speak of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The first is fighting against stereotypes we have of the other no matter what the media show us and what we ourselves have experience. The second is to accept the challenge that the reason that divides us cannot be put aside either in any type or occasions of dialogue nor with any partner of dialogue. The greatest challenge is the mystery that surrounds the Christian and Muslim understanding of the identity and mission of Christ. This, instead of inciting each partner to strive to be closer to God, rather incites each to prove to the other that what they are saying is wrong. This sometimes generates hatred and more often, impossibility to accept the other. This is what Omar expresses in his thought below.

Here the problem lies in our inability to accept each other`s faiths on their own terms. Muslims have acknowledged an Islamized Christianity and Christians have often Christianized Islam. Thus, with all good intentions, both communities have sought to negate, or at least neutralize, the individuality and integrity of the faith of the other in order to find room for it in their own tradition and worldview.²⁰⁴

By overcoming this above mentioned challenge, we can be assured of a lasting dialogue for a lasting peace without at the same time compromising our faith which is the basic condition to any Christian-Muslim dialogue.

²⁰⁴ I.A. OMAR, *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 69

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The mystery of the presence of Christ in Christianity and in Islam is the topic I researched. This mystery in my understanding, on one hand concerns specifically Jesus` identity and his mission to all humanity as it is put down in the Bible and in the Qur`an. On the other hand, the mystery of the presence of Christ concerns also humanity`s response to it and how that response impacts our life among ourselves and our destiny with God. These two aspects of the mystery are expressed somehow by Cragg in the following in a form of a question.

Our purposes throughout have not been only academic but vital and open to the world. It remains to ask whether there is any shortening of the perspective to be discerned across the territory between Muslim and Christian which all the foregoing – from either view – point – has served to map? If, in so many ways as we have seen, what has to do with Jesus is clue to all else between us about God and man, are there any signs of hope of closer understanding?²⁰⁵

From my research and the arguments I made throughout this paper, I can confidently say that the answer to this above question is yes even though that does not mean that we I am convinced that we can arrive at a full and perfect understanding of

²⁰⁵ K. CRAGG, *Jesus and the Muslim : An Exploration*, 277

one another and the mystery of Christ. Such understanding is only possible when we meet God face to face. This is what makes the mystery of Christ interesting and exciting. I defined mystery as sacrament in the sense that it is a visible sign of an invisible reality. This is to say that the visible sign makes effective the graces that it represents. In this sense, I showed that Christ is the primordial sacrament of salvation from God according to Christian understanding, and that Christ is a special sign from God, and an example to emulate according to Qur`anic understanding.

I also showed in my research and arguments that Christ`s presence in Christianity and in Islam is real but remains a mystery. This is better explained in the way Bevans puts it. “I think the best way to explain how we come to know the mystery is to reflect on how we come to know mystery in our everyday, ordinary experience—how, in other words, we come to know the mystery of a human person. Like God, human persons can never be reduced to objects.”²⁰⁶ As we can see, Bevans` criteria for understanding the mystery of God, which is the mystery of Christ, involve the human every day ordinary experiences. It is in this sense that I considered necessary to trace the mystery of Christ presence in Christianity and in Islam starting from the human experience of Abraham and the Patriarchs. “Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, traces its faith back to the patriarch Abraham and belongs thus to the family of Abrahamic religions.”²⁰⁷ By this, I mean that the mystery of God, apart from the fact that it cannot be known perfectly takes human beings a life time experience in struggling to grasp

²⁰⁶ S.B. BEVANS, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 15

²⁰⁷ R.S. ARMOUR, *Islam, Christianity, and the West: A Troubled History*, 1

even the little understanding we have of Christ's presence in our life. This reminds us of the story of the messianic expectation.

Bevans gives us another definition of mystery, quoting Marcel. "A mystery isn't something unknown or unknowable but something that is already known, but absolutely impossible to be figured out, solved, or controlled. [...] A mystery, says Marcel, 'is something in which I myself am involved.'"²⁰⁸ By his response and obedience to God's call and guidance, Abraham became the father of the Christian and Muslim faiths. Heck expresses here this same reality. "It is not surprising to find common ground between Christianity and Islam, which, along with Judaism, look to Abraham as proto-monotheist, friend of God, and father of the covenant between God and his people."²⁰⁹

The conclusion drawn here is twofold. First, for Islam, Jesus' role and importance cannot be separated from the faith of Abraham and the exceptional favor of God upon him. Second, for us Christians, the same God of Abraham who was present throughout the stories of the patriarchs is the one mysteriously revealed in Jesus Christ. In this sense, therefore, we understand Jesus' statement: "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn8:58). Surprisingly, Jesus was nailed to the cross and the Jews who waited for the messiah to deliver them and reestablish the Davidic kingship, could not recognize in him the real presence of God (Jn7 8:28) despite his teaching with authority and his wonderful deeds. In other words the mystery of Christ is once again manifested in the paradoxical events of his life. On one side is his mysterious conception, his public

²⁰⁸ S.B. BEVANS, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 14

²⁰⁹ P. HECK, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism*, 1

ministry with his wondrous divine deeds and on the other side the negative reaction of his listeners that led to his passion, death and resurrection. This manifested mystery of Christ known as the paschal mystery is present in the Church today and forever through the Church as sacrament of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit all in communion with the Father. This active presence of the Trinity is what gives the seven sacraments their symbolic prophetic meaning and generates the graces they signify. Consequently, these sacraments call us to incarnate specific values as signs of the kingdom already present but not yet fully lived. All this is mystery as Bevans puts it, quoting Saint Augustine. “If you have understood, then this is not God. If you were able to understand, then you understood something else instead of God. If you were able to understand even partially, then you have deceived yourself with your own thoughts.”²¹⁰ However, this understanding is to be balanced as far as the Church profession of faith is concerned and this is here again expressed by Bevans. “At least in our Christian tradition we say that God is fully known in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.”²¹¹ This leads us to the mystery of Christ’s identity and mission as it is understood in Islam.

We have seen in the second chapter that the Qur`an relates the story of the incarnation in a very similar way to Christianity, though, Jesus is never considered divine or equal to God (S: 112). Jesus is honored in a special way as Parrinder puts it. “The Qur`an gives a greater number of honorable titles to Jesus than to any other figure of the past. He is a ‘sign’, a ‘merci’ a ‘witness’ and an ‘example’. He is called by his proper name, Jesus, by the titles Messiah (Christ) and Son of Mary, and by the names

²¹⁰ S.B. BEVANS, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 11

²¹¹ S.B. BEVANS, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 13

Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word and Spirit of God.”²¹² The summit of the Qur`anic expression of the mystery of Jesus` presence in Islam is found in the so called denial and affirmation verses of the crucifixion and resurrection. Here, I showed that we have fundamental common truths from which we can say that the mystery of Christ is real in both Christianity and Islam. First, both agree that Jesus` conception came about through God`s special intervention and that was through the Spirit in a Virgin prepared for that purpose. Second, is that Jesus` deeds were performed with God`s permission and that no other prophets either before or after him worked miracles like Jesus. Third, Jesus was raised up to heaven by God himself who could not let him be defeated by the humiliation of the cross. This is supported in a similar explanation by Ayoub quoted here by Zahniser. “He is convinced that *Table* [5]:117 and *Family of Imran* [3]:55 indicate that God brought about an end to Jesus` life on earth which was followed by a celestial life with God, and that these verses stress the ‘Oneness of God’ (*tawhid*)”.²¹³ Fourth is that Jesus is alive with God and will come on the last day to judge people according to the message God asked him to teach his fellow brothers and sisters. Considering these fundamental points of Christian-Muslim faith, we can affirm with conviction that Christ is really present in Islam in Christianity in a way that if observed we can be admitted in the presence of the God of Abraham on the last day. However, the big challenge is how do we interpret these four fundamental points as Christians and Muslims? This is where Christian-Muslim dialogue takes place.

²¹² G. PARRINDER, *Jesus in the Qur`an*, 16

²¹³ A.H.M.ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 27

In my third chapter I showed that both Christianity and Islam are ready for dialogue and offer practical grounds for this dialogue. “Christians can only rejoice over the fact that the Qur`an presents Jesus and his virgin mother as ‘portent... for (all) peoples’ (S21:91; 23:50). Some Muslims have even gone so far as to consider Jesus as the ‘seal of holiness.’”²¹⁴

The first condition of dialogue is to have a firm faith in one`s religion as well as having a good knowledge of its doctrines. Second is respect for the partner in dialogue. Thirdly, I proposed practical ways in carrying out dialogue with the aim of not fighting to show that God is on my side but striving to be on God`s side

Before the mystery of Christ`s presence in Islam and in Christianity, we should stop fighting between ourselves and ask God: What more do you want to teach us through our own sacred texts and those of the other religion, through the exemplary life of our believers and those of the other religion? This spirit of dialogue is encouraged in the following statement. “Nevertheless, in both Islam and Christianity, it is the same God who calls man to salvation and the same humanity trying to respond. Surely then there must be ways in which Muslims and Christians can endeavor to come closer to one another in loving response to God.”²¹⁵ One of the main difficulties in Christian-Muslim dialogue concerns the fact that each denies the authenticity or divine origin of the partner`s sacred texts. “Suleiman Darrat, director of the Arabic and Islamic Studies program at the University of Kentucky, points out that the Gospels incorporate both

²¹⁴ M.BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Interreligious Documents I*, 54

²¹⁵ M. FITZGERALD – R. CASPAR, *Signs of Dialogue, Christian Encounter with Muslims*, 75

God's word as sent down and raised up. And, if one adds the *Hadith* or Muslim Tradition to the Quran, the Muslims too have authoritative documents that are both sent down and raised up."²¹⁶ We may conclude with Omar writing on the role of Christ in the chain of prophetic witnesses and the impact he has on our life basing ourselves on the Bible and the Qur'an: "In the long drama of human prophets and a humanity challenged to seek prophetic fulfillment, Jesus plays a unique role. [...]. Prophethood in Islam is the divine answer to human folly and false confidence, a source of guidance for men to God and the model of a fulfilled humanity."²¹⁷

Here we need to be realistic about what is going on in the world without denying facts. However, we should also make a sharp distinction between Islam and the Muslims as well as between Christianity and Christians. "Thus Father Michel reminds us that Muslims in many parts of the world, particularly in the East and the South, tend to see Christians as synonymous with the West or the United States; this causes them to think of the "Christian faith mainly as a justification for power and wealth."²¹⁸ This is on one hand. On the other hand, "similarly Christians tend to see Muslims in light of the stereotypical images of Islam prevalent in the media, which convey Islam as oppressive to women and a violent and intolerant religion."²¹⁹

I argued that Christ is the foundation of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is not without considering the controversy that doctrinal statements can bring about. So, to be realistic, I considered Dupuis' idea expressed here. "It is clear that, as Panikkar agrees,

²¹⁶ Cf. A.H.M.ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 5

²¹⁷ I.A.OMAR, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity, Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*, 158

²¹⁸ T. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essays on Dialogue*, 3

²¹⁹ T. MICHEL, *A Christian View of Islam, Essays on Dialogue*, 3

the mystery of Jesus Christ as Christian faith understands it cannot serve as a point of departure upon which to agree in advance of the dialogue. We must therefore look elsewhere.”²²⁰ Dupuis suggests that, “One possible starting point is the experience of the divine mystery is the Spirit. As we have remarked above, a spiritual exchange and a communion in the Spirit are necessary conditions for a fruitful theological dialogue.”²²¹

In the same sense, “We could find ample common ground for moral values precious to both spiritual traditions: knowledge, faith, loyalty, communal solidarity, and political order. All these areas and more are important for the kind of dialogue envisioned by Sheikh Fawzi al-Zafzaf.”²²² In the same line, the Second Vatican Council’s pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world expresses how Christ was the ultimate sacrament of God and the embodiment of human solidarity. “For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved” (GS 22). Going in the same direction, “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” (NA 3). To this, is added the need for human equality as mentioned in the Qur`an (S 49:13). So we can conclude with Barker that,

²²⁰ J. DUPUIS, *Jesus at the Encounter of World Religions*, 237

²²¹ J. DUPUIS, *Jesus at the Encounter of World Religions*, 237

²²² A.H.M. ZAHNISER, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, 10

Islam has a mission for Christianity: reminding Christians that God transcends both number and image. And Christians have a mission to Muslims: reminding Muslims that even a strict monotheist could be self-righteous. Both Christianity and Islam will become arrogant if they do not listen to each other`s critical witness. Each mission is a moment when there can be an opportunity for growth.²²³

²²³ G.A. BARKER, ed., *Jesus in the World`s Faiths : Leading Thinkers from Five Religions Reflect on His Meaning*, 143

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