# MAKING FRATERNITY AN ESSENTIAL LINK IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

LUBOŠ KROPÁČEK

**ABSTRACT**

The article provides a survey of ideas and initiatives advanced by Christian and Muslim religious leaders and believers towards a mutual religious rapprochement in the past more than fifty years. On the Christian side, the process was started at the Second Vatican Council and developed with the great personal involvement of all popes of the following half-century. Muslim positive initiatives, from official centres as well as from committed intellectuals, have appeared somewhat later and still have to combat hostile moves of partisans of radical Islamism. Our article discusses the culminating point reached so far in the positive efforts of Pope Francis in his meetings with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyib, including their agreement on the fraternity as a desirable bond for all believers in God. Our reflections try to mark out the main points of understanding achieved by the two religious leaders in the document signed by them in Abu Dhabi in February 2019 and, thereafter, further developed by the Pope in his comprehensive encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, issued in Vatican on the feast of Saint Francis in October 2020.

**Keywords**

Second Vatican Council; Declaration *Nostra Aetate*; Interreligious dialogue; Islam and Christianity; Pope Francis' visits in Muslim countries; Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*

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The rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic all over inhabited continents may have made us realise how interwoven and interdependent our human world is, whether for better or worse. To be sure, this new element of oecumenicity does not make old contradictions disappear but rather can push them, along with our attitudes, towards

reconsideration. A positive outcome might be an increased sense of a basic co-responsibility of all humans for good relations among themselves and for the world. A great part of this responsibility lies with the believers of great universalist religions Christianity and Islam. Our concern in this paper will be to record and to appreciate ideas and initiatives developed from these two sides in order to serve the noble goals of their monotheist faiths in their mutual esteem and areas of possible cooperation. Needless to say, this trend has been for years meeting with various degrees of opposition, on the Muslim side even with violent resistance. Let us hope the fall of the so-called 'Islamic state' will mark a further decline of radical trends labelled for want of a better word Islamism or Islamicism. In our determined rejection of false allegations presenting murderous policy and hatred of other human beings as God's will, we wish to give the floor and our support to all sincere endeavours of both Christians and Muslims who wish to contribute to a better understanding in their mutual relations. After a diversity of experience in the past half-century in a search for an efficient means of rapprochement, for values that can bring us all closer together and to be perceived in the dialogue as authentic on both sides, it has appeared reasonable to lay the primary stress on the concepts of mercy, compassion, and fraternity.

## 1. In Our Time and Further Ahead

After centuries of hostilities or, at least, tensions and claims of one's own supremacy, a new course in inter-religious relations was started on the Christian side by the Second Vatican Council. The way to an unprecedented openness to dialogue and reciprocal reverence, which the Council drew up as general guidelines for the future relations of the Church to non-Christian religions, was defined in broad lines in the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*.[1] It has become a unique new element in the history of the Church, of its history, and its policy henceforth. Complex discussions that preceded the adoption of the Declaration have been recorded and analysed by several respected personalities. Along with brief introductory remarks of Karl Rahner, which are

[1] Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. It was proclaimed by Paul VI on Oct. 28, 1965. Usual reference is *Nostra Aetate, NAe.*

sometimes published together with the Second Vatican documents,[2] in German-speaking Central Europe, including the Czech lands, the most widely used source of information on the prehistory, course of events, and results of the Council is the detailed monograph by Otto Hermann Pesch.[3] As regards relations with Islam, the circumstances of its inclusion on the agenda of the Council have become widely known. Pope John XXIII considered a need to use the aggiornamento efforts of the Council also to purify teachings and liturgy of the Church from the views and expressions which, in the past, may have nursed antisemitic moods. Council fathers from Arab countries, however, warned of the possible undesirable effect of the gesture that might be viewed as compliance with the attitude of one side of the current Middle East conflict. To avoid any misrepresentations and inconveniences, the Council adopted a decision to transgress borders of the Christian oecumenicity with friendly words not only towards the Jews but also towards believers of other religions.

The Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, in its more than 50-year existence, has proved undeniable wisdom and vitality, sometimes even a capacity to foresee future developments of mankind 'being drawn closer together'. This trend has led the Church to examine closely her relationship to non-Christian religions and 'what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship'. The first two sections of NAe draw the general outline of this rapprochement. 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in (other) religions,' which in spite of their differences 'often reflect a ray of that truth, which enlightens all men'. The Church herself, of course, 'proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ, the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6). In this spirit, the Church exhorts her sons to dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions… 'in witness to the Christian faith and life… to recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men'.[4]

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[2] See e.g. the Czech publication: *Dokumenty II. vatikánského koncilu* (Praha: Zvon, 1995).

[3] Otto Hermann Pesch, *Das zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Vorgeschichte – Verlauf – Ergebnisse – Nachgeschichte* (Praha, 2005). O. H. Pesch (1931–2014) was a Catholic theologian teaching at German Protestant Universities. His account of the Council is generally appreciated as liberal, sometimes criticized.

[4] This is a brief summary of the introductory part of *NAe* preceding the section on Islam.

Section 3 consists of two paragraphs on Islam. 'The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself merciful and all-powerful… They value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting…' In the last part, the section calls emphatically upon both Christians and Muslims to forget their past quarrels and hostilities and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare as well as peace and freedom.

The idea of opening a dialogue with the large part of the world represented by non-Christian religions was never strange to Cardinal Montini, who was elected to Peter's stool in June 1963 after the death of John XXIII and adopted the name Paul VI. Right in the first year of his papacy, he started a new tradition of pastoral and bridge-building travels to foreign countries with a visit to the Holy Land. In his sermon in Bethlehem, he conveyed greetings to Jews and Muslims, addressing both as believers who, like ourselves, adore the one True and Living God of Abraham. In explicit words, the inclusion of Muslims into the Divine plan of salvation was adopted into the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, promulgated by Paul VI with a heading *Lumen Gentium* in November of the same year, 1964. Later, with the approval of John Paul II in October 1992, these words characterising the relation of the Church towards the Muslims were also included into the Catechism of the Catholic Church. They read: 'But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst them are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us, adore one and merciful God, who in the last day will judge mankind.'[5]

Paul VI himself made great efforts to promote the concept and practice of meaningful dialogue with non-Christians. As early as before the end of the first year of his pontificate, he established a Secretariat for Non-Christians as a part of the Papal Court. It has remained in operation until the present times, renamed since 1988 The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. Since Paul had included it into his first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, the very concept of dialogue (originally colloquium) became a new important theological term. He categorised partners in dialogue into three concentric circles: mankind as a whole,

[5] Cf. *LG* 16 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 841.

monotheists, and believers professing great extra-European religions. In general, Paul's encyclical urges all to build up relations between religions on the basis of reciprocal esteem, and not on antagonisms, and to cultivate common ideas of freedom of religion, of fraternity, and of a social consideration to the utmost limits.

Within his humanitarian efforts, Paul VI paid special attention to improving the Church's relations with Islam. This special concern is sometimes explained by a reference to friendly discussions, which the young Montini, since his time as archbishop of Milan, held with the pioneer of Christian-Muslim better understanding, Louis Massignon. The great French orientalist (1883–1962), whose Catholic faith had been remarkably invigorated through his own early experience of research in Iraq centred on the Muslim medieval mystic al-Hallaj, inscribed his name into a number of initiatives serving as a hand of friendship offered to Muslims. According to his suggestions, Christians might intercede for Muslims in their prayers. With the consent of a bishop, he even founded an association for such spiritual intercession called badaliya ('acting on behalf of').[6] The 'Kopernican turn' accomplished by the Second Vatican Council in modifying the Church's view of Islam had, of course, several major architects and movers, readily cooperating with the benevolent Pope. In general, the Council proved receptive to a friendly theological openness towards non-Christian religions along the lines elaborated by Karl Rahner (1904–84) and his disciples. As regards Islam, the Council and thereafter the Curia had a chance to work in combination with outstanding experts in Islamology, such as Dominican Georges Anawati (1905–1994) or 'white father' Robert Caspar (1923–2007). The Egyptian Anawati,[7] convert from Orthodoxy to the Greek Catholic faith, became a leading personality of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo (IDE0) and a widely respected partisan of Christian-Muslim good relations. Robert

[6] Cf. Maurice Borrmans, 'Aspects théologiques de la pensée de Louis Massignon sur l'Islam,' in *Louis Massignon et le dialogue des cultures* (Paris: Cerf, 1996). Massignon's letters and other texts for the Association came out at the same Catholic Publishers Cerf in 2011: L. Massignon, *Badaliya, amour de l'autre* (1947–1962).

[7] Anawati (in Arabic written Jurj Shahata Qanawati) wrote more than 250 books or articles on various aspects of Islam, its theology (George Anawati and Louis Gardet, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane* (Paris, 1948)), philosophy and theology of Ibn Sina compared to Thomas Aquinas, Islamic mysticism, Islam in modern age, etc. His memory is greatly studied and appreciated in Germany, cf. Jean-Jacques Pérennes, *Georges Anawati. Ein ägyptischer Christ und das Geheimnis des Islam.* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2010), where was established The George Anawati Foundation.

Caspar, in his turn, also did not spare efforts to promote the research and activities of all islamological institutions formed or inspired by the Council, such as the reformed Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (PISAI), Secretariat for the Non-Christian Religions and the Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien. To assess his contribution to the Christian theological and practical understanding of Islam and to the dialogue, a mention should be made of his monograph *Pour un regard chrétien sur l'islam* (Centurion, 1990) and two volumes of *Traité de théologie musulmane* (PISAI, 1987 and 1991).[8]

Unfortunately, after a decade of rapprochement, the prospects for a fruitful dialogue with the Muslims collided with the growth of a totally opposing tendency – hostile fundamentalism, sometimes in extreme forms. This negative current got a strong impetus from the mental shock of the Arabs by the crushing defeat in the Six-Day War with Israel in June 1967. In many parts of the Islamic world, this naksa (failure) was interpreted as a punishment of a pro-Western secular policy of the Arab and other Muslim régimes, which could be set right only by rigid Islamisation. The search for this remedy inspired political movements in a number of countries throughout the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) and wide Islamic support for the Muslim guerrilla warfare campaign against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In spite of the anti-Western – sometimes conceived and stylised as anti-Christian – trends in several Muslim societies, a general tendency towards a closer contact with the (post)Christian West and even with the Christian Churches could not be excluded from the general economic and social progress of mankind. In spite of difficulties, most Christians remained faithful to this mission, as is demonstrated by the line of the dialogue drawn up by the Council and with some slight modifications also adopted and followed by Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox Churches.

In the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, during his pontificate 1978–2005, carried on the style of Paul VI with numerous pastoral and/or missionary visits even to the countries where Christians were only minorities. His name will go down in history especially for his participation in the fall of communism. Yet, his contribution to the progress of the dialogue with Muslims deserves recognition as

[8] See R. Caspar's obituary written by Michael Fitzgerald: 'Robert Caspar, sa contribution à la pensée de l'Église sur l'islam,' in *Chemins de dialogue,* vol. 31, 2008, 151–154.

well. In his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (from March 1979), he reproached Christians with a weakness of their faith in comparison with some non-Christian believers. Then, in autumn of the same year, he openly spoke about spiritual bonds uniting Christians and Muslims, which he was not shy to repeat on various occasions. A unique, unprecedented event in the interreligious history was the Pope's speech to young Muslims, assembled at a big stadium in Casablanca in Morocco (19. 8. 1985), laying stress on the common spiritual patrimony in spite of numerous differences between the two monotheist religions. A year later (27. 10. 1986), John Paul inaugurated a new tradition of common prayer for peace with the participation, side by side, of representatives of the great religions assembled in Assisi. The interfaith tradition, labelled the 'Spirit of Assisi', has been further maintained with an active organisational élan of the Sant Egidio Community. In the changing world of the 1990s, John Paul's kind-hearted moves towards Muslims found new ways and opportunities. To general surprise, he kissed a copy of the Qur'an offered to him by an Iraqi delegation visiting the Vatican (1999), and during his own visit to Damascus (2001), he entered the Umayyad mosque, well-known as i.a. a shrine with the tomb of John the Baptist, venerated by Muslims as Nabī Yahyā. The reverence shown to a non-Christian Scripture and a visit to a mosque have been unprecedented in papal history. Likewise, John Paul's visits to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, formerly Soviet republics, where he held discussions on Christian-Muslim relations, were clear marks of a new era. He became a real pontifex, active in building interfaith bridges. In his own words, he was well aware of the importance of this work in a world despiritualised by materialism, secular fundamentalism, and religious extremism.

Benedict XVI, during his tenure of the papacy (2005–2013), tried to build on the outreach of his predecessors in spite of the general worsening of the socio-political climate between the West and the Muslim world after the Islamist brutal strike of 9/11. The Pope still maintained that the dialogue between the two great religions was a vital necessity for the world marked by relativism and indifference to transcendence and the universality of reason. Feeling a need to insist on the necessity of respect for religions and their symbols, he condemned the insulting of Muslims by the publication of ludicrous cartoons of Muhammad in the Danish Jyllands-Posten and later in other European newspapers (2005) and did not hesitate to criticise the West for spreading wrong

life models excluding God. Yet, his goodwill in approaching Muslims in this spirit, critical of Western materialism, was overshadowed by the unfortunate effect of his lecture on 'Faith, Reason and the University' held at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006. Many Muslims felt offended by his quotation of disparaging remarks about Muhamad and his cultural merits by the 13th century Byzantine Emperor.[9] Indignant voices resounded from Muslim leaders (i.a Sheikh al-Qaradawi) as well as politicians. Before the end of the week, the Pope expressed his deep regret for the words that aroused such a reaction, stressing that they were just a quotation, not an expression of his opinion. At the same time, he invited potential Muslim partners to a mutually respectful dialogue. The strong emotional effect of the event bore fruit also in a good sense as an impulse to Muslim opinion makers to take an active stand on the need for dialogue. It found a loud expression in the 'open letter' signed finally by 138 Muslim authorities just a year later: in the first version in Ramadan 2007.

By that time, it had become obvious that the dialogue with Muslims could be held on various levels. It has become customary to speak about a dialogue of life, of action, of theological exchange, and of religious experience. When examining the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the past half-century, it would not be difficult to find examples of all these types. The acting subjects are, of course, varied on both sides. In addition to the above mentioned community Sant'Egidio, attention should be given to the movement Focolare inspired by Jesus' prayer for believers 'that they may all be one' (John 17:21). The movement, founded by Chiara Lubich in 1943, has succeeded in including in their inter-religious friendship a surprisingly large range of Muslim partners, especially intellectuals from Jordan or Algeria.[10] The efforts to elaborate more specifically on the Christian-Muslim theological agreement and/or the differences have been attempted from various angles. To deal with the details would go beyond the scope of this paper.

[9] Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos: 'Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and here you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.'

[10] For a general survey of ideas and activities of the Focolare see Paul Lemarie, 'Vivere insieme l'unità nella diversità. Il movimento dei focolari e il dialogo con i musulmani,' *Islamochristiana* 40 (2014): 31–53. For Czech readers a general account is given by Luboš Kropáček in *Theologická revue* no.2 (2016): 397–415, where a special attention is paid to Islamological writings of the editor-in-chief of the Focolarinis' journal Città nuova Michele Zanzucchi.

Czech readers can find excellent analytical surveys in the monographs by Denisa Červenková.[11]

As regards the essentials of Christian-Muslim relations, the Council, as we have seen, focussed its attention on the moral consensus, thus knowingly avoiding speaking about Muhammad and the Qur'an. Those few who have dared to look for an acceptable or just conciliatory approach towards a fair reciprocal understanding between the two faiths have always had to face a serious obstacle in the sensitivity of the historically younger partner. Evidently, Islam relies on a belief in its superiority over the older monotheisms, whose failures Muhammad's message was intended to rectify. For Christians, for their part, the problem is how to include Muhammad into the universal history of salvation. Among the attempts to do so, the most interesting seem to be those of Claude Geffré (1926–2017), professor of theology at the Institut Catholique de Paris, and of Kenneth Cragg ( 1913–2012), Anglican bishop and scholar. Both have worked out inclusivist concepts, which assign a distinguished place to the Prophet of Islam, though not comparable to the significance of the Redeemer Jesus Christ. Geffré, as an active co-founder of a Research Centre for Christian-Muslim Studies (GRIC) aroused attention by his differentiation of a/the Divine Word from the common human speech. A crucial difference appears in the use of the definite or indefinite article: thus Geffré refers to Jesus' Word as (in French) la Parole, while the Muslim Qur'an is une Parole (de Dieu). In other words, the Gospel and the whole Revelation in Christianity has been reflected anew in the Qur'an, which, however, lays a different accent on the mystery of God; on the Christian side, the transcendence has become immanent through love, while in Islam the stress is laid on the Oneness and radical transcendence. Presumably, Geffré's views may have had some influence on the religious living together in French-speaking countries in Europe and in the Maghreb.

In the English speaking contact zones, a similar effect may have been produced by broad activities, including about thirty books of Kenneth Cragg. He devoted about sixty years of his life, spent mostly in the Arab world, to a generous interpretation of Islamic spirituality and culture. Made in recognition of his merits an Anglican Bishop of Egypt in 1974, which was a new institution at that time, he worked devotedly for

[11] Denisa Červenková, *Náboženství jako teologický fenomén* (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2013); *Katolický pohled na náboženskou pluralitu* (Praha: Karolinum, 2016).

good relations with the Muslims. In his belief, put briefly, the Christian can sincerely recognise Muhammad as a Prophet of the Qur'an, while being well aware at the same time of how much more Jesus is for him.

Besides the whole set of his monographs on the fundamentals of Islam and their assessment in the Christian perspective,[12] Cragg enriched his presentations of the rival religion to Christian readers with a translation from Arabic of a philosophical fiction by the Egyptian surgeon Muhammad Kamal Hussein Qarya zālima, in English translation *City of Wrong – A Friday in Jerusalem*.[13] The book presents fascinating scenes taking place in Jerusalem on Good Friday, when various types of people insist that Jesus be crucified. Each of them has his or her personal reason to see him die, for he was awakening people's consciences, which they could not bear. Moreover, it shows how people in a group are ready to do what they would not approve of individually. The story is a unique case of a high appreciation of Jesus Christ's moral supremacy by a Muslim author, understanding, at the same time, the motives of the behaviour of all those who feel ashamed facing such hardly attainable height.

Before proceeding further on to discuss the present-day dialogue and its moral issues, more attention is to be given to trends and achievements on the Muslim side.

## 2. Muslims Seeking a Dialogue

Since the emergence of Islam in world history, its believers have always been anxious to establish its place and their own position in the past and future course of human affairs. According to its teaching, God (Allāh), revealed His will to the mankind He had created, usually through chosen prophets. Only some peoples and communities sought to obey, namely Jews and later Christians, but their submission suffered a lot of defects. The Muslims believe that the Jews corrupted the Divine revelation, especially in Ezra's (in the Qur'an called 'Uzair) attempts to reconstruct the passages of the Torah, which had got lost during the

[12] See esp. *The Call of the Minaret* (Oxford: University Press, 1956); *Muhammad and the Christians* (1984); *Muhammad and the Qur'an* – altogether about thirty valuable titles, full list on Wikipedia.

[13] Muhammad Kamil Husayn, *Qarya zālima* was published and obtained the Egyptian State Prize for literature in Cairo in 1957; Cragg's translation came out in Amsterdam in 1959.

captivity in Babylon. The Christians, in their turn, have been made an object of strong criticism for their beliefs in the incarnation, Trinity and resurrection of Jesus (in Arabic ʻĪsā), whom the Muslims respect and even venerate as a great Prophet, but only a human being. They show great respect also to his mother Maryam, whose name appears in the Qur'an more often than in the Gospels. The rapid expansion of Islam throughout the countries in North Africa, Southern Europe, and large parts of Asia subjected numerous Christian and Jewish communities to the Arab Caliphate with its clearly defined rules of religious policy. Both older monotheist religions were tolerated as a 'protected people' (ahl al-dhimma) with a clearly defined a sort of 'second class' position in the Muslim dominated society. However strange it may appear, some Islamist radicals would like to reestablish such a type of social structuring once again, after it has disappeared everywhere with the modern age.

Modern Muslims' discussions about their religious position amidst the plurality of world-views around them are an important challenge for research and analysis. The standard opinion, prevailing in the Middle Ages, was blaming Jews and Christians for corruption (tahrīf)[14] of Holy Scriptures (Jewish Tawrāt or Christian Injīl) based on Allāh's revelation. Some leading intellectuals, in particular Ibn Khaldun (d. 1405), nowadays widely considered a precursor of sociology, did not, however, speak about an ideological deformation but simply about an erroneous interpretation. In our times, Islamic theology and jurisprudence have to deal with a much broader range of faiths than in the past, when it was sufficient to draw a line between the 'Abrahamic' three and unacceptable others. The very term 'Abrahamic' has come into general modern use by widening the scope of the Quranic reference to dīn Ibrāhīm (Abraham's religion). In its positive notices about monotheists, the Qur'an prefers the term 'people of the Book/Scripture' ( ahl al-kitāb). In two instances (verses 2:62 and 5:69), those who 'shall have reward with their Lord' (lahum ajruhum ʼinda Rabbihim) are indicated as Jews, Christians, and Sabians.[15] In modern discourse, whether held by Muslims or non-Muslims, Islam is naturally included in the 'Abrahamic religions,' but the relevance of others, including some Islamic sects, is

[14] The word *tahrf* is used in modern Arabic ideological texts in the meaning 'revisionism'.

[15] The Quranic term Sabians (in Arabic Sab'ín) is usually interpreted as referring to the gnostic sect in Harran (in Northern Mesopotamia) or, later more probably, to Mandaeans living (until recently) mainly in Southern Iraq.

subject to disputes. It seems that belonging to this group has become a matter of prestige. The Abrahamic religions share a number of honourable prophets, beliefs, and institutions, the stock-taking of them is a challenge for modern mass media.[16]

After the abolition of the Caliphate by Turkish republicans in 1924, Muslim political leaders tried hard, but without success, to reestablish a Central Authority for Sunni Islam. After the bitter defeat of Arab states by Israel in 1967, a partial substitution was found in setting up a large multi-purpose organisation of states with predominantly Muslim populations. At that time, the difference between Sunni and Shi'a did not matter. After about forty years of existence, the Organization, grouping 57 member states, adopted the name Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In spite of its manifold activities in political or cultural fields, it has not become a convenient place for solving problems of a purely religious nature, such as heresy or the highest levels of the interfaith dialogue. Even the Sunni-Shi'a quarrel assumed a political rather than a religious substance and appearance, most often as the permanent tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In the past, in Nasser's era, the disagreement seemed to be calmed by a fatwa issued by the then al-Azhar Imam Mahmūd Shaltūt in 1959. It was admitting Shi'a Muslims into mainstream Islam, which was duly done in the set-up of the OIC. Difficulties appeared in the 'Arab Spring' in 2012, when al-Azhar, then temporarily dominated by Salafists, strongly rejected the 1959 fatwa and banned the Shi'a worship and understanding of Islamic history. That move was thwarted a year later by the new leader Abdel Fattah Sisi's repression of the Muslim Brothers and by the position of the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib, in showing tolerance towards the Shi'a.

The Sunni-Shi'a split within the Islamic umma still persists along with other internal divisions. The problems were debated and pushed to a proposed settlement in Amman Message (Risālat 'Ammān), a document issued in November 2004.[17] It was worked out and agreed by Muslim scholars with the assistance of Jordan's King Abdallah II in

[16] See in Wikipedia: Table of prophets of Abrahamic religions; it includes Bahāī faith, Christianity, Druze, Islam, Judaism, Mazdaeism, Rastafari movement and Samaritanism. There exist also other lists and surveys, including many more religious groupings professing monotheist faith.

[17] For details see *Amman Message*, accessed 9 July 2020, https://ammanmessage.com/the-amman-message-full/.

order to provide answers to urgent questions: who is Muslim, when is it legitimate to excommunicate anybody (takfīr) and on what principles should religious opinions (fatāwā i.e. fatwas) be delivered. By July 2005, the document was signed by 200 high ranking Islamic scholars from over 50 countries. It gives recognition to 8 large schools of fiqh, in addition to the standard Sunni madhāhib also to Shī'a Ja'farī, Shī'a Zaidī, Zāhirī and 'ibādī. Along with it, the Declaration extends the protection from takfīr on the followers of Ash'arī / Māturidī creed, real tasawwuf (Sufism), and what it terms 'true Salafi thought', as well as upon 'others recognised as Muslims'. Generally speaking, the trend manifested by the Declaration seems to have done away with the sectarianism of the old style. Yet, political ambitions and predatory lust got upperhand in a number of new groupings. Saudi King Abdallah unveiled their face in pointing to those 'who claim to be associated with Islam and hide behind Islam to commit irresponsible deeds.'[18] This deplorable trend is embodied in a number of radical, even terrorist formations, such as al-Qaida (al-Qā'ida), Islamic State (ISIS, Dā'ish), Nigerian Boko Haram, Somali Al-Shabaab, Afghani Tālibān, and others. To our sorrow, many honest Muslim leaders are sometimes reluctant to inflict takfīr of this nature since, in their benevolent opinion, whoever professes the shahāda should not be labelled with unbelief.

An important factor in modern Islamic thought is, of course, seeking an appropriate relationship to the West and Christianity. After centuries of mutual rivalry and distrust, an assembly of high-ranking dignitaries, calling themselves 'leaders of the Islamic religion', agreed on sending an open letter to those they considered their Christian counterparts. It was dated Oct. 13 2007 (corresponding to the Ramadan ´īd al-fitr 1428 AH ). Its title, according to its opening part, reads 'A Common Word between Us and You'. It is a quotation from the Qur'an (3:64), the text of the whole document being conceived as an invitation by Muslims to Christians to live together in peace, harmony, and cooperation. The structure and the general spirit reveal a deep influence of Christianity, namely the commandments of love, which constitute the axis of parts I 'Love of God' and II 'Love of the Neighbour', the attitudes of both religions being documented as concordant in numerous quotations from the Qur'an and the Bible. It is fair to remark that Islamic moralists had so far preferred to preach strict obedience to Allah and shari'a commands, an

[18] King Abdallah, quoted in the *Jerusalem Post*, retrieved 15 August 2007.

appeal to love being more or less tolerated only in Sufism and its poetic expressions. The third part of this historic document invites Christians again to a Common Word, this time recalling the Gospel of Mark on Jesus defining the first of all commandments (12:29–31). In conclusion, the document points to the importance of its appeal: Christians and Muslims together make up more than 55% of the world's population. Therefore, 'let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill. Wal-Salaamu Alaykum. Pax Vobiscum.'

The document, unprecedented in its tenor in the history of Islam, originated as a response to Pope Benedict's regrets sent to Muslim leaders to explain the misunderstanding that had provoked so much bitterness following his lecture in Regensburg in September / Ramadan of the previous year. After a primary exchange of letters, the contact opened a way for the unique initiative of Muslim dignitaries to address the Pope, the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches and leaders of larger Christian denominations. The number of Muslim signatories rose from the original 138 to more than 300 finally. The response from the Christian side was mostly positive, sometimes marked with a varied degree of caution.[19] About the time of the public appearance of the Common Word, the trend towards strengthening the interfaith dialogue with the Christians found a highly important Muslim representative in the person of the King of Saudi Arabia Abdallah b. Abdal'aziz. Shortly after his ascension of the throne and of the related office of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques (which he held 2005–2015), he visited Pope Benedict, in November 2007 – the first Saudi monarch to do so. His enthusiasm for the interfaith dialogue found expression in conferences he held or sponsored in Mecca and in Spain, as well as in the United Nations, where he intervened to promote dialogue among civilisations. His name appeared in a similar connection also in Vienna with the official opening of the King Abdallah bin Abdal'aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in November 2012. In his last year, he felt the necessity to raise his voice in warning against the 'Islamic State': 'From the cradle of revelation and the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad I call on leaders and scholars of the Islamic nation

[19] For details see *A Common Word* on Wikipedia. The version provided from Amman presents a slightly abridged full text. Other versions provide information on the purport, addresses, and aftermath of the document along with quotations of its important statements.

to carry out their duty towards God Almighty, and to stand in the face of those trying to hijack Islam and to present it to the world as a religion of extremism, hatred and terrorism… History will be witness against those who have been the tool exploited by the enemies to disperse and tear the nation and tarnish the pure image of Islam.'[20] On the margin of Muslim discussions: is it appropriate to call 'Islamists' those who have gone astray?

The shameful image of Islam spreading in the world due to the atrocities of the Islamic State perpetrated now and then by Islamists anywhere induced responsible Muslim leaders to react. A brief mention should be made of at least two initiatives taken in Morocco and in Saudi Arabia by Muslim religious leaders and scholars anxious to promote the dignified face of Islam by concerted efforts involving all parts of the Umma. The Marrakesh Declaration, adopted in January 2016, defended the rights of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim countries. The Mecca Charter, endorsed in May 2019, specified pan-Islamic principles supporting anti-extremism, religious, and cultural diversity and building relations with other faiths.

In the modern West, the perspectives of the dialogue have become an important part of the Theology of Religions. In contrast to the general media, the authors of this type of research and expert literature try to avoid prejudices and cheap generalisations. Our brief introduction will point only to a handful of Muslim writers and ideas, which have been presented and studied in this type of the Christian (or Orientalist) literature. A convenient tool to start with is Hugh Goddard: *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity*.[21] The author spent more or less his whole life studying Islam in Oxford and in Muslim countries and, afterwards, working for Christian-Muslim understanding at Universities in Nottingham and Edinburgh. His influential *Perceptions* opened the series called Studies on Islam and Christianity issued by the Centre specialising in this field of research in Selly Oak, Birmingham.[22] In his detailed inspection of modern, predominantly Egyptian literature,

[20] Mathew Sammir, 'King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia and Christian Secret Wife,' on Facebook 26 August 2015, reproduced in Wikipedia.

[21] Hugh Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal, 1996); followed esp. By *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2000).

[22] Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (CSIC), established in 1976, has been made a part of the University of Birmingham. It has always had outstanding Islamologists on its staff (Jorgen Nielsen, David Thomas) as well as Muslim

he distinguishes three types of Muslim views of Christianity: polemical, eirenical, and intermediate. The first part offers three lines of polemics. In their forefront stands the famous *Lectures on Christianity* ( Muhādarāt fí l-Nasrānīya, 1942, and numerous re-editions) of Muhammad Abu Zahra, with its detailed explication of how the pure, monotheist teaching of the prophet ʻĪsā (Jesus) was corrupted by converts from paganism.[23] Another substantial anti-Christian polemical study is due to al-Azhar's Scheikh Ahmad Higazi al-Saqqa, the author of Muhammad's prophethood in the Bible (*Nubūwat Muhammad fí'l-kitāb al-muqaddas*, Cairo, 1978). In his opinion, the true Gospel revealed to Jesus was misrepresented by his followers, a great part of the distortions being ascribable to (Saint) Paul. Misrepresentations of a fatal type, according to the imagination of Saqqa and other Muslim authors, made the early Christians, then facing hard times persecutions, to perceive biblical predictions of Muhammad as referring to Jesus or the Holy Spirit.[24] The third line of polemics is directed against Christian Churches and their missionary activities. A wide range of Muslim authors blame them for enmity and intrigues against Islam, sometimes 'in the service of Western imperialism'. This type of polemical, or rather critical zeal, has survived great transformations in the world with the end of the cold war and still goes on, with just occasional changes of foci of interest and vocabulary employed.

Certain views, discussed in the polemical style, seem to transcend generations with a great vitality. Such is the case of Paraclete, whom most Muslims are still ready to take for Jesus' prediction of the coming of Ahmad / Muhammad. Another case is the apocryphal 'Gospel of Barnabas', which in some Muslim social circles has been enjoying more notoriety and credibility than the four canonical Gospels. Being probably a fake produced to serve the Ottoman propaganda against the Christian adversaries on the threshold of the modern times, it narrates Jesus' predictions of Muhammad and, finally, his assumption to Heaven, while another man (Judas?) was crucified instead of him, in

post-graduate students and researchers among the authors of its valuable production of monographs on Christian-Muslim relations.

[23] Sheikh M. Abu Zahra (d. 1974) represented the conservative current of interpretation of the sharí'a Law at al-Azhar as well as in the Maglis al-sha'b (Parliament) in Egypt of Nasser's era. For Goddard's discussion of his views see *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity*, 59–67.

[24] Most often, the Muslims point to Jesus's promise to the apostles to send them 'paraklétos'.

a way fully corresponding to the Qur'an.[25] In contrast to these widely spread critical lashes on the very sources of Christianity, some modern Muslim scholars try to reach a deeper understanding of the rival faith. In this respect, Goddard's intermediate category includes the Egyptian philosopher Hasan Hanafi (b. 1935), whom the present-day Wikipedia introduces as 'a leading authority on modern Islam'. In addition to his native Cairo, during his academic life, Hanafi held lectures as visiting professor in a number of Western countries (including Prague) and has won great international respect for his opinions about Islam, recognised mostly by liberals and condemned by fundamentalists. However, he shares the traditional Muslim opinion asserting the superiority of Islam to Christianity. He compares the relation between them 'as a relation of certainty to conjecture, of apodicity to hypothecity, of evidence to paradox, or even of rationality to irrationality'.[26] Proud of his faith, he was one of the original signatories of the Common Word. Like him, some of his disciples combined being sincere Muslims with a modern professional approach to the study of religion learnt from their Western colleagues, which brought them difficulties and compelled them to emigrate. Such was the lot of a highly erudite scholar Nasr Abu Zayd (1943–2010), who had to leave Egypt and proceed with his project of a humanistic Quranic hermeneutics in Leiden and elsewhere in the West. His liberal theology of Islam may seem to us paradoxical: he studied the Qur'an as a cultural product of the 7th century Arabs, yet without denying its divine origin. Modern upsurge of the Islamic theological thought may still take us by surprise in more than one respect. As regards sincere efforts from the Islamic side to develop Muslim Christology and to contribute to a fruitful Muslim–Christian understanding in the theological field, let us mention at least two oustanding scholars: Mahmoud Ayoub (b. 1935) from Lebanon, active in the American academic life, and Adnane Mokrani (b. 1966 in Tunis), professor at PISAI and Gregoriana. We will meet him again in our last chapter.

The limited scope of our paper does not allow us to pay attention to modern ideas that have appeared in the philosophical and religious

[25] A classical account was given in Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Oxford, 1907). For a modern, more analytical account see Christiane Schirrmacher, 'Das "Evangelium des Barnabas." Hintergrunde einer Polemik,' *Religionen unterwegs* 6, no. 2 (2000): 10–16.

[26] Hasan Hanafi, *Religious Dialogue and Revolution: Essays on Judaismm Christianity and Islam* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshoo, 1977), 56.

thought in the Maghreb, Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia and, with a large – even Western – response, among Shi'a thinkers of Iran. Our topic being Christian-Muslim endeavours to improve their reciprocal understanding, it is fair to record the memory of Maurice Borrmans (1925–2017) and to highly appreciate his work as a professor at the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome and as the editor-in-chief of the journal Islamochristiana, which he founded in 1975 and directed almost until 2004. Borrmans carefully researched texts about Jesus ('Īsā) in the textbooks and manuals used in Arab schools, as well as in important modern exegeses of the Qur'an (tafsīr), in theological treatises and in fiction.[27] The choice coincides with what Goddard has called eirenical. A large part of the examined texts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and other languages of the Muslim world has been found to contain respectful remarks of Jesus/'Īsā. The highest level of understanding and ethical appreciation has been probably reached by the above mentioned Muhammad Kamil Husain' s Qarya Zālima.[28]

In the ever closer interrelations within our global world, it is not surprising to see the Muslim discussions on their attitudes towards other religions, in particular Christianity, to show a rising trend. They are carefully watched and kept under review by general Western media and politicians, as well as Christian intellectuals. Current views of the Muslim theologians of religions are, as a rule, followed with great interest by all of them. The collected volume published in Zurich[29] presents a selection of opinions voiced by prominent Muslim scholars from various countries and of various, though in general moderate, trends. There is a general agreement on God's acceptance of the plurality of religions, as shown in several āyāt of the Qur'an, the stress being laid on 2:62, 5:69 (concerning 'the people of the Book') as well as on more general 5:48 ('…so compete in good deeds'), sometimes as well on the primaeval pact with the Children of Adam (7:172). The authors introduced in the volume include several Islamic scholars of Asian origin whose liberal

[27] Maurice Borrmans, *Jésus et les musulmans d' aujourd'hui* (Paris: Desclée, 1996).

[28] The unique work translated into English by Cragg and widely discussed in Goddard's *Perceptions* (esp. p. 96–118) is mentioned here in our first chapter, see footnote 13. The present text draws in part on our monograph in Czech Luboš Kropáček, *Islám a Západ* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2002), 154–162.

[29] Ernst Fülinger, Senad Kusur (Hg.), *Islam und religiöser Pluralismus. Grundlagen einer dialogischen muslimischen Religionstheologie* / Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Religionen, Band 17. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2019). Reviewed by Karl Prenner in *Religionen unterwegs*, Wien, no. 4 (2020): 33–35.

views found a large audience due to their final abode in USA: Fazlur Rahman (d. 1983) from Pakistan, Abdulaziz Sachedina (expert in both Shi'a and Sunni issues of India's cultural orbit) and Asma Afsaruddin (from Bangladesh). Nurcholish Madjid (Indonesian, 1939–2005) tried in a similar vein to modernise Islam and extend its pluralistic tolerance even to Hindus, Buddhists, and perhaps also the Chinese. The Turkish openness to dialogue is represented by Prof. Mahmut Aydin, who made his doctoral studies partly at the Gregorian University and the Papal Oriental Institute and partly in Birmingham. His PhD thesis bears the title *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council*. As to thought in modern Shi'a Islam, the volume presents Abdulkarim Sorush, at the time being probably the most respected Iranian philosopher. His contribution explains the plurality of religions as well as of our interpretations of religious texts and experiences. A specific case of European Islam is dealt with in the contribution of a Bosnian Nedžad Grabus, since 2006 Mufti of Liubliana in Slovenia. In reference to the Quranic 13:11 ('Allah will not change the condition of a people as long as they do not change their state themselves'), as well as on the basis of the painful experience of Bosnia, Grabus pleads for a clear division between State and Religion in Islamic thought.

The rising interest in wider modern and contemporary Islamic thought is an obvious fact, easy to explain. Nevertheless, the abundant Western literature on the subject remains partly unsteady and even discordant in its assessment and the terminology it uses. The most current general labels used in categorising continue to be traditionalism, modernism, secularism, and liberalism. More recent additions include the Islamic feminism and various types of radical positions. All these terms appear in the most recent Islamic Reader published by a group of Czech Orientalists in Prague.[30] The editors have added some less usual general topics, such as environmentalism or Islam on the Internet. In general, the voluminous anthology offers a selection of Arab authors (texts in original and in the Czech translation), Islamic/Islamist writings in other languages have not been taken into consideration. And a real hindrance is an entire omission of the relationship to Christianity and concerns of the interreligious dialogue.

[30] Ondřej Beránek, Bronislav Ostřanský, Pavel Ťupek (eds.), *Islámská čítanka* (Filozofická fakulta UK, 2020).

## 3. *Misericordiae Vultus*

By electing Jorge Mario Bergoglio to ascend the Holy See (Mar. 13 2013), the papal conclave handed the Church's supreme office to a man of unusual background. As a son of an Italian family settled in Argentina, he embodies both the traditional and the new horizons of Catholic Christianity. In Latin America, the Church cannot ignore problems of social inequality and oppression. It has to know how to speak meaningful and healing words on social issues and how to give the needy a helping hand. As an expression of his genuine Christian approach, Bergoglio chose his papal name in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi and adapted his lifestyle to devoted service to common people, including great care of the poor. The same patron's name and model have been as well for years manifesting his commitment to work for good relations with believers of other faiths. The current situation in the world reminds us often of the times of the Crusades, when St. Francis bravely talked with the Egyptian Sultan about a closer religious understanding and peace.[31] This event has become a historic mile-stone, newly discussed and recalled as a welcome spark for the present-day endeavours to re-animate the Christian-Muslim interreligious dialogue.

In this respect, Pope Francis has had to face severe challenges from radical Islamist movements. The most brutal among them, such as ISIS, al-Qaida and their offsprings, enjoyed their heydays during the early years of his pontificate. Yet, he has always known how to differentiate among those who claim to profess Islam. His peace-seeking calls resound twice a year, in his Urbi and Orbi surveys, including Muslim majority countries and warnings against the spread of Islamist terror in Europe. His voice was heard and commented upon, sometimes, from the side of Islamophobic radicals, with toxic accents. Francis's commitment to work for better understanding and relations with Muslims were reflected in a number of his official as well as missionary and pastoral visits to their countries. Within the rich programme

[31] St. Francis held talks with the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in Egyptian Damietta besieged by crusaders in 1219. Attempts to elucidate their contents and their obvious religious importance may be found in a number of modern historical and/or theologising works, esp. of Julien Green or of the Canadian Franciscan Giulio Basetti-Sani, OFM, *Mohammed et St. François* (Ottawa: Commissariat De Terre-Sainte, 1959);. or, more recently, Gwenolé Jeusset, OFM, *Rencontre sur l'autre rive* (Paris: Editions Franciscaines, 1996).

of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in May 2014, he met with political and religious leaders in Jordan, Palestine, and Israel, as well as with refugees and common people of all Abrahamic religions, expecting the benediction and perhaps assistance from the Catholic Church in their, sometimes, difficult situation. For his visit to the Holy Land, he invited two distinguished personal friends from Buenos Aires to accompany him: Rabbi Abraham Skorka and the Imam of the Argentinian Islamic community Omar Abboud. He embraced both in front of Jerusalem's Wailing Wall. In Turkey, he visited the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, said prayers with key Muslims as well as, in an ecumenical spirit, with leaders of the Orthodox Church (November 2014). His visit to the Central African Republic in November 2015 had specific risks and importance to bring reconciliation and as much peace as possible to a country torn apart by groups calling themselves Christians or Muslims without properly understanding the purport of these labels. His visit to Myanmar (Burma) in November 2017 faced hardly imaginable difficulties when the pontiff tried to help the powerless Muslim Rohingya exposed to persecution and expulsion. Following the advice of specialists, he knew he should not mention them by name; accordingly, he referred to them only in general within ethical commandments. As a rule, journalists got a chance to ask questions on board his plane.

Pope Francis engaged in a great number of activities, which set us an example for our own, however imperfect, efforts. After the wave of anger raised by the terrorist events of 9/11 had somewhat calmed down, a new wave appeared with the aftermath of the rather unsuccessful 'Arab spring' and the rise of crowds of Asian and African migrants pressing their way into Europe. The onrush reached a critical maximum in 2015. At that time, Pope Francis decided to declare an Extraordinary Jubilee of Year of Mercy to be held from Dec. 8 2015 to Nov. 20 2016. A detailed explanation of the targets of the Holy Year was given in the papal bull *Misericordiae Vultus* issued in April 1915.[32] It starts by comparing mercy to 'the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness'. After a long account of the mercy in the Biblical and the Church's

[32] For the full text in English see: Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, accessed 9 July 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.pdf. The quotations are taken from the points 11 (John Paul II) and 23.

thought and history, the bull comes to discuss the modern era. John Paul II 'highlighted the fact that we had forgotten the theme of mercy in today's cultural milieu'. And, nowadays, 'there is an aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church. It relates to Judaism and Islam, both of which consider mercy to be one of God's most important attributes… Among the privileged names that Islam attributes to the Creator are Merciful and Kind. This invocation is often on the lips of faithful Muslims who feel themselves accompanied and sustained by mercy in their daily weakness. They too believe that no one can place a limit on divine mercy because its doors are always open.' The last symbolic image quoted from the bull reminds us of Vatican's Holy Door open for the Jubilee Year.

The fitting concept of mercy has quite rightly been chosen for a friendly dialogue with Muslims. Motives and incentives for sympathy or compassion are expressed in both Testaments of the Bible in various terms (several in Hebrew, six in Greek), and the importance of this feeling or impulse in the Qur'an – proper to God and inspiring to mankind – is beyond any doubt.[33] The adjectives Rahmān and Rahīm stand at the head of 99 '(Allāh's) most beautiful names' (al-asmá' al-husnā), each one belonging to Him as His epitheton constans. To start any important utterance, whether in spoken or written form, with the basmala (formula bismi llāhi r-Rahmāni r-Rahīm) is a matter-of-course part of the Muslim culture. Unfortunately, translations into European languages have not been standardised. In Latin texts of the early modern age, we could read 'In nomine Domini Misericordis Miseratoris'. In English, we find often expressions 'Merciful and Compassionate', but the Wikipedia offers alternative 'God the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful'. Anyway, Christians and Muslims do certainly agree in the emphasis they both lay on mercy / rahma in their religious discourse. We could and still can hear it in the comments of Pope Francis when he speaks about concrete instances of misery, conflicts, and the unsettled problems of the migration crisis, warning against the prevailing indifference.[34] Besides mercy, the situation, however, calls for discussions

[33] See my introductory essay 'O milosrdenství' (About the mercy) in Zdeněk Vojtíšek (ed.), *Islám a křesťanství: Sborník k poctě Luboše Kropáčka* (Praha: HTF, 2019), 13–19. The collected volume was published to commemorise my 80th anniversary.

[34] The current covid pandemic induced the pontiff to a homily on Divine Mercy and prayers for a recovery. Several instances have been recorded on the Internet on 19 April 2020, see https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/.

also on ethical and social concepts appearing closer to the modern secular way of life. Such is traditionally the tolerance for the Muslims. And such are human rights for the modern West. In a way, both settings of these social values have come to the fore as extensions of the caritas / rahma in the modern everyday life with its predominantly worldly concerns.

Many Muslim historians and social scientists are accustomed to extolling the toleration shown in the history of their societies, in particular in medieval Andalus, to religious minorities of 'people of the Book' (ahl al-Kitāb), i.e. Christians and Jews. It is in no way difficult to point to the inaccuracy of this flattering image in regard to most political formations and epochs constituting Islamic history. Our modern understanding of religious freedom and tolerance goes far beyond their limited scope, which used to be a daily bread in the past of both the Christian and the Muslim world. Recently, a strong initiative for a peaceful dialogue has come from the United Arab Emirates. Having set up The International Institute for Tolerance, the UAE held a large international conference to discuss tolerant Islam in November 2018, established a Ministry of Tolerance, the first of this kind in the Arab world, and proclaimed the following year the 'Year of Tolerance'. The Emirates' leaders take pride in their country's economic policy, which includes employing more than a million Christian workers recruited from the Philippines or India. In contrast to their more powerful and less tolerant Saudi neighbour, the UAE allows their Christian migrant workers to practise their own religion. But at the same time, the Emirates have joined the anti-Shi'a military campaign in Yemen, which Francis did not hesitate to rebuke.

Pope Francis accepted an invitation to take part in the international conference held in Abu Dhabi on 3–5 February 2019, becoming thus the first pontiff in history to enter the Arabian peninsula – the 'cradle of Islam' in journalistic parlance. He met there with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib, with whom he had earlier opportunities to speak and to become friends on the occasions of the Sheikh's visits to Vatican and his own to Cairo. This time, the Emirati post office had the chance to issue stamps with portraits of both religious leaders and inscriptions 'Encounter of the human brotherhood' in Arabic and English. The most important outcome of the journey and the meetings was the signing by both leaders of the 'Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together', dated Feb. 4 2019. The key

concept of fraternity opens the long document by explaining its religious importance: Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved.

The general notion of brotherhood or fraternity is not, however, quite free of possible misunderstandings. They can be based on historical experience, as well as on a part of the shared traditions of both Christians and Muslims. They include the story of the first fratricide committed by Adam's son Cain (in Arabic Qābīl), killer of his brother Abel (Hābīl ). In the Arab Near East, both brothers' memory is recalled in popular beliefs related to certain places, such as Abel's presumed tomb just above the main highway between Damascus and Beirut, or Cain's place of exile shown among inhospitable rocks in Aden. Stories of fratricide occur in narratives of European as well as of Eastern history from antiquity down to modern times. Nevertheless, on façades of hôtels de ville in French cities, it has become customary to place the famous slogan of the Revolution: Liberté Egalité Fraternité, although the Jacobins' policy was not very fraternal. In Arab societies, the concept of fraternity (ukhūwa) was mostly understood as applicable only to Muslims. Organisations called brethren/brotherhoods (ikhwān) were formed by Sufis, in modern times also by various socio-political associations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Jam' īyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn). To extend the notion of ukhūwa, in the universal meaning, to Christianity bears still a tinge of novelty in general Muslim thought. We have been all created by the One God, but the Muslims do not dare to call Him 'our Father'. In their general opinion, He is Lord (Rabb), to whom we owe obedience. Only the Sufis tried to speak of Love; signs of affectionate devotion, however, seem to emerge in some currents of modern spirituality. In like manner, the concept of human fraternity has found a passable way into Islamic thought in its outreach towards Christianity.[35]

## 4. *Fratelli tutti*

There is no vestige of any ambiguity in Pope Francis' understanding of fraternity. To make it clear, he built on this notion a substantial

[35] Cf. Adnan Mokrani, *Wathīqat al-ukhūwa al-insānīya, qiyam mushtaraka wa risāla jāmi'a* (A Document on Human Fraternity, Shared Values and Common Mission),' *Islamochristiana* 45 (2019): 1–22.

encyclical letter, whose mission was underlined by the date chosen for its release: the Pope signed it in Assisi on Oct. 3 2020, and on the following day, Sunday (Oct. 4), on the Feast of Saint Francis, he mentioned it before his Angelus Prayer in Rome. On the same day, distinguished personalities from different cultural backgrounds took part in its public presentation in the Vatican's new Synod Hall. Indeed, it was Saint Francis of Assisi, whom Pope Bergoglio has chosen as patron of his papacy and whose kindness to all shapes of creation gives a strong impetus to the present-day encyclical letter on 'Fraternity and Social Friendship'.[36] Even the opening words Fratelli tutti are the quotation from Saint Francis' love of all living creatures in the world. No doubt, the Pope's endeavours to reach peace and better understanding with Muslims have given the Saint from Assisi the privilege of receiving a prominent mention in the Pope's encyclicals: the previous one dealing with ecological problems Laudato Si' (2015), as well as the present one devoted to the pains of our present-day tottering humanity.

The reference to the Saint of Assisi pervades the opening part of the letter, conveying its general message:[37] '…the call for love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother as much when he is far away as when he is with him'. Next to Saint Francis, the Pope mentions as the source of inspiration his meetings with the Grand Imam in Abu Dhabi, where both religious leaders agreed on declaring that God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties, and dignity, and has called on them to live together as brothers and sisters (FT 5). The ensuing Letter consists of 287 paragraphs of varied length, exposing the Pope's sorrows caused by the current moral situation of humanity as well as hopes based on the Christian faith and the trust in human moral advance.

The gloomy nature of Chapter One resounds in its title 'Dark Clouds over a Closed World' (FT 8–55). The general regret reads, 'as society becomes more globalised, it makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers' (FT 12). There appear new forms of cultural colonisation, as well as of gaining control over peoples by spreading despair and discouragement (FT 14–15). Wealth has increased but, together

[36] Cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, accessed 9 July 2021, https://bit.ly/2VoK0hw.

[37] In referring to St. Francis of Assisi, the Pope uses quotations from modern Franciscan litterature, such as Eloi Leclerc OFM, *Exil et tendresse* (Paris: Éd. Franciscaines, 1962).

with inequality, new forms of poverty are emerging. In practice, human rights are not equal for all (FT 21–23). In the world of conflicts and fears, the temptation grows to build a culture of walls, to raise walls in the heart, on the land (FT 27). Globalisation and progress go ahead without a shared roadmap; there exists a moral deterioration. We forget the lessons of history. Recently, the sense that we are a global community has been revived by the Covid-19 pandemic, but still, in the economy, we behave as having lost the taste of fraternity (FT 32–36). The policy towards migrants has revealed an absence of respect for human dignity in the conduct of certain populist political regimes. The problems of migration are discussed at greater length; in the Pope's opinion, they will play a pivotal role in the future of our world (FT 37–41). Real dangers appear in digital campaigns of hatred and destruction. Social aggression has found unparalleled room for expansion through computers and mobile devices; the destructive forms of fanaticism appear even among religious believers, including Christians (FT 42–46). What we need is to seek the truth in dialogue. Despite these dark clouds, which may not be ignored, Pope Francis proceeds in the following chapters to take up and discuss new paths of hope.

Chapter Two opens the way to renewed hope with New Testament's parables, starting with the Good Samaritan as a model for neighbourhood. Strengthened by the Biblical lessons, we are invited to seek our proper way in the modern world. We should not expect everything from those who govern (FT 77–78). The question 'who is my neighbour?' has been perfectly answered in the New Testament (Lk 10.37; Mt 25:35). The words of Jesus compel us to recognise Christ in each of our abandoned and excluded brothers and sisters (Mt 25:40–45; FT 80-86). The following chapter, having discussed the concepts of the open world and of love, pleads for a love ever more open. Open societies integrate everyone. At this point, the stress in the discussion is laid on fraternity; radical individualism is a virus (FT 105). The ongoing discussion then deals with social friendship, moral good and solidarity. An important point for our modern societies is, of course, the social role of property. The Pope advocates the rights of the poor. He quotes Saint John Chrysostom as a voice of early Christianity preaching to share wealth with the poor (FT 119). In his own opinion, the right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right, derived from the principle of the universal destination of created goods. If we make something our own, it is only to administer

it for the good of all (FT 122). The chapter concludes with a stress on a global ethic of solidarity and shared responsibility in the whole human family.

In Chapter 4, the discussion bears on what follows from the universal fraternity. It concerns problems of migration as well as encounters between cultures. In this context, the Pope sums up his reflections with the Imam al-Tayyib on the positive impacts of relations between East and West. 'The West can discover in the East remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism. And the East can find in the West many elements that can help free it from weakness, division, conflict and scientific, technical and cultural decline…' (FT 136). The universal horizon of our life should not be forgotten. We can work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective (FT 142–145). A critical note appears in a remark concerning local 'narcissism', unrelated to a healthy love of one's own people and culture but prone to building walls (FT 146). Chapter 5 seeks a better kind of politics achievable in a global community of fraternity and a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles (FT 170–173). The reflections proceed towards specifying the concept of 'political love', which was discussed also with the Grand Imam. The two religious leaders 'called upon the architects of international policy and world economy to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace; to intervene at the earliest opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood' (FT 189).

Chapter 6 praises a social dialogue as an always possible option between selfish indifference and violent protest (FT 198–202). The needed new culture and peace include recovering kindness, which facilitates a quest for consensus. Saint Paul mentioned the kindness among the fruits of Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22; FT 223–224). Chapter 7 draws the lines for paths of renewed encounters. They include the art and architecture of peace. Speaking about reconciliation, the Pope mentions the South African Bishop Tutu's handling of the guilt of those responsible for the policy of apartheid. Sure, forgiving is not forgetting; the Shoah must not be forgotten, nor must we forget the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (FT 246–249). To conclude, Pope Francis, in the footsteps of John Paul II, calls for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty. In Chapter 8, the Pope, referring to *Nostra Aetate*, pleads for peace between religions. He gladly recalls his fraternal meeting with the Great Imam: '…we resolutely declared that

religions must never incite war.'[38] (FT 285–286). In the last paragraph, he concludes the reflection on universal fraternity by mentioning the thinkers of various religious backgrounds who have inspired him.

Our concern in this study has been to find out how the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* was received among Muslim religious and intellectual leaders. The Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyib welcomed it through his Twitter account on the very first day as a good extension of the previous document signed in Abu Dhabi. Also Adnan Mokrani and other Muslim intellectuals, cooperating with Christian institutions in Europe, expressed positive comments. Arab media mostly brought into focus the emphasis laid on all of us being brothers and sisters, which was not a value judgment generally shared by Muslims in the past. A positive account of the document appears in the Saudi-based English daily Arab News, easily found on the Internet. The documents of the Holy See, come out in several languages, including Arabic, but not in Russian. This time, the translation of *Fratelli tutti* into Russian was provided by Muslim scholars living in the post-Soviet republics. It certainly manifests a sincere interest from the Muslim side in this kind of approach. Let us hope that the way forward shown in this style of active religious policy-making will help all of us to overcome surviving hostile instincts, both inborn and inherited from the past. 'The effort to seek God with a sincere heart, provided it is never sullied by ideological or self-serving aims, helps us recognise one another as travelling companions, truly brothers and sisters' (FT 274).

*Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University*
*Pacovská 350/4*
*140 21 Praha 4*
*Czech Republic*
*E-mail: lubos.kropacek@ff.cuni.cz*

[38] Pope Francis, 'Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,' *The Holy See*, last modified 4 February 2019, https://cutt.ly/Olzn6aZ. For Czech readers, this document has been recently introduced in a detailed study by Lukáš Nosek in *Theologická revue* (Prague) 2021/2 and 3.