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Hope in Christian–Muslim Dialogue

A Catholic Perspective

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Abstract

The article proposes a new view of interreligious dialogue, beyond the fourfold scheme which has been reiterated ever since 1984: dialogue of life, collaboration, of spirituality and scholars (*Dialogue and Mission* 28–33). If one reflects the Catholic dialogical intuitions in the light of the past 30 years, and in the light of the dynamic of hope, five “hopes in dialogue” can be identified: practical problem solutions—a better understanding of the other—and of one’s own world view—faith proclamation—and value sharing.

The wording of the theme “Hope in Christian–Muslim Dialogue”¹ allows us to tackle three different questions. (1) Theology: what is a Christian understanding of hope that can be presented helpfully in an interreligious theological dialogue? (2) History: do recent developments of such dialogues provide a reason for hope? (3) Agenda: what are our intentions, indeed, our hopes when we engage in Christian–Muslim dialogue?

“We will strive to make the world share in the divine redemption and in the hope which inspires Us.” Paul VI expressed his resolution in *Ecclesiam Suam*²—that is, in the Church’s “Magna Carta of dialogue.”³ His wording hints at an interesting relationship between salvation and hope. 4|5

We live in a time of ‘religious’ violence: people use faith traditions to justify their brutality and to motivate themselves and others to commit crimes. All too often, aggressors claim to have Islamic motifs for their atrocities. Attempts to foster interreligious dialogue, by contrast, are criticised as a betrayal of one’s own religion, be it a naive betrayal or a shrewd one. In such a situation, a new study about hope in interreligious dialogue is vital. Before stating what the Catholic Church hopes to achieve in Muslim–Christian encounters, a fundamental question needs to be tackled: what is the characteristically Christian understanding of hope that shapes such projects? Put simply, let us consult the Biblical witness and the theology based on it: what is, then, hope?

1 A previous version of this paper was presented during the 2017 meeting of the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. I am grateful to my fellow commissioners for their suggestions.

2 Paul VI expresses a personal wish here. In French, it is the desire to make the world *partager notre richesse merveilleuse de rédemption et d’espérance*. The Italian version expresses the Pope’s wish to “communicate” to the world *la nostra meravigliosa sorte di Redenzione e di speranza*, and the Latin text speaks of the Pontiff’s intention for human beings: *eos divinae Redemptionis consortes faciamus et spei, quae inde est nobis iniecta*.—The quote is from the Encyclical’s n° 69 in English section numbering; it differs slightly from the Italian and French paragraph counting (n° 71). Below, the numbering to be used will always be that of the *Ecclesiam Suam*’s English translation.

3 John Paul II, *Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat for Non-Christians*, March 3, 1984, n° 1: “[...] *Ecclesiam suam*, rightly considered to be the ‘magna charta’ of dialogue in its various forms.” In a more specific context, for interreligious dialogue, John Paul II used the *Magna Charta* metaphor speaking of *Nostra aetate*: the Conciliar Declaration is “the Magna Carta of interreligious dialogue for our times” (*Ecclesia in Asia* (1999) 31). In an even more particular sense, namely, for Muslim–Christian dialogue, Benedict XVI applied “*Magna Carta*” twice to the third paragraph of *Nostra aetate*: “For us, these words of the Second Vatican Council remain the *Magna Carta* of the dialogue with you, dear Muslim friends” (*Address to Representatives of Some Muslim Communities*, Cologne, August 20, 2005); “I should like to reiterate today all the esteem and the profound respect that I have for Muslim believers, calling to mind the words of the Second Vatican Council which for the Catholic Church are the *Magna Carta* of Muslim-Christian dialogue” (*Address to the ambassadors of countries with a Muslim majority and to the representatives of Muslim communities in Italy*, Castel Gandolfo, September 25, 2006).

1 A Theology of Hope

An everyday usage of ‘hope’ would be the expression of an optimistic wish, the attempt to see that things will turn out well. This everyday usage is not identical with what Christians point at when they speak about their hope.⁴

1.1 The name of hope

Pope Francis, for one, clearly distinguishes between optimism and hope. His theology of hope⁵ can be explicated on three levels.

- 1 **Charism.** While optimism is a human attitude, hope is a gift from the Holy Spirit. This claim can be based on Paul’s teaching. He counts hope as one of the the charisms, the grace-given capacities that believers are granted in order to serve the community. For Paul, the three “higher charisms” are faith, hope and love, with the “highest” being love (*1 Corinthians* 12:31; 13:13). What follows from the ‘charismatic’ character of hope; in other words, why is it important to see hope as a Spirit-gift? **5|6**
 - *Gratitude.* Hope cannot be produced by our own willpower; it is not the fruit of some ascetic or self-suggestive effort. It is an experience. Rather than being an effect of our action or contemplation, hope is, first, something “passive,” a “passion”⁶ in the sense that it can only be received; received in the humility of gratitude.
 - *Exaltation.* The Spirit makes people go beyond themselves (cf., *Acts* 2:4). That is precisely what happens with people seized by hope: seeing God’s future come, they can, so to speak, ‘jump’ over their limits (cf., *Luke* 1:41).
 - *Discernment.* If it is from the Holy Spirit, it is also a sign that helps in discerning the will of God (cf., *Romans* 12:2): people who experience growth in hope⁷ are in the state in which their view is open to God’s activity; now, they can also sense their own call in greater clarity.
 - *Perspective.* As a gift from the Spirit, hope does not merely refer to a pleasant development that may be about to occur around us. That would be optimism; and that would be short-sighted. The activity of the Spirit has expressed itself most fully in the resurrection of Christ from the dead (cf., *Romans* 8:11). Hope is looking towards God’s plan. It looks toward the good end of all history. This leads to the second level.
- 2 **Reliability.** Francis says that hope “*non delude mai*—never misleads, never disappoints, never deludes.” He thus alludes to Paul’s affirmation that hope will not put to shame those who rely on it (*Romans* 5:5). The reason is that hope’s foundation is not someone’s particular mood—“*buonumorismo*, good-humouredness,” as Francis would call it—but the Christ event (cf., *Romans* 5:6). That is the basis for the third and most striking level of the Pontiff’s theology of hope.
- 3 **Name.** Francis says that for Christians, faith has a name. It is—Jesus. The biblical justification for this claim was the Pope’s starting point for developing his theology of hope, viz., the *Letter to the Colossians*. God’s project for history, his “mystery,” says the text, has become visible now, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). If for Christians the name of hope is Jesus, this means three things for them.
 - The reason for their hope is what happened in Christ, in his coming, serving, suffering, dying, rising. **6|7**
 - The experience of their hope is to sense him as present in their communities, in their lives.
 - Christian hope consists in sharing the joy of the risen Christ, a joy that is not fixed to a particular choice of words but—referring to a name, and thus to a person—this hope can

4 In French, a helpful distinction can be made between *espoir* and *espérance*; the first can designate the object of an optimism, the second the profound attitude. Whether the Latin word for hope, *spes*, is related to ‘viewing’ (*spectare*), is unclear; just as the claim that English ‘hope’ is related to ‘hopping’ remains doubtful. In Greek, ‘hope’ is *elpís/ἐλπίς*. The noun derives from the verb *ἐλπεν* (*elpen*) ‘wish, choose, desire’ (etymologically related are English *will* and German *wählen*). The Hebrew word for ‘hope’ is *tiqwá*; its root is *q-w-h* ‘wait in suspense’ (related is Arabic *q-w-y* ‘be tight, tense, strong’).

5 https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20130909_cristo-nostra-speranza.html.

6 Cf., Martin Luther, *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519–1521). Weimar Edition, vol. 5, p. 166, line 11.

7 Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* 316: “(...) I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity,”

find ever new linguistic expressions, such as “we will always be with the Lord” (1 *Thessalonians* 4:17).

1.2 The dynamics of hope

The Christian dynamics of hope, grounded already by the Hebrew Bible, can be explicated in eight characteristics.

- 1 **The basis of hope is historical.** God has begun to manifest his saving power. “The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!” (*Psalms* 126:3–5). From the memory of God’s great deeds flows the perspective of salvation.
- 2 **The act of hope is personal.** The believers’ trust is in God himself. “Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth” (*Psalms* 71:4–5).
- 3 **The fruit of hope is ecstatic.** To cheerfully risk a departure beyond the guarantee of calculable success: that is the proverbial trust *contra spem in spem*; when Paul describes Abraham’s faith he writes: “against hope he believed in hope” (*Romans* 4:18). The patriarch, this “friend of God” (*James* 2:23 ecc.), was not dissuaded by frustrating and frightening appearances. He, rather, trusted in God, who creates surprisingly, *ex nihilo*.
- 4 **The content of hope is criteriological.** In view of a particular expectation for the fulfilment of history—eternal communion with God—present attitudes and activities get a specific practical orientation. “As you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ (...) God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 *Corinthians* 1:7–10).
- 5 **The understanding of hope is evolving.** With the growth of experience through history, the promised fulfilment acquires ever new meaning. “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (*Colossians* 1:9–10). ⁷⁸
- 6 **The structure of hope is anticipatory.** Hope is joyfully sensing that the Lord’s Kingdom is becoming reality among us. That is why Jesus can praise those who are open for the coming transformation, and why he can assure them: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (*Matthew* 5:3).
- 7 **The effect of hope is a new perspective.** Present constellations, constructions and commitments, just like today’s failures or sufferings, are neither final, nor all-powerful—*nor* are they meaningless. “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (*Romans* 8:18).⁸
- 8 **The realisation of hope is participatory.** Neither activism nor fatalism would correspond to living hope; it is realised, rather, in the serenity that Christ’s reign is growing. “As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain” (2 *Corinthians* 6:1).

1.3 Good news: salvation in hope

In the light of these characteristics, we will now be able to see why salvation and hope go together, what the specifically Christian profile of hope is over against an Islamic concept of hope, and how hope can become a key category for Christian–Muslim dialogue.

- **Salvation and hope.** Hope is the believers’ present joyful awareness that they are journeying towards salvation; and, the other way round, the experience of that joy enables human beings to freely live self-giving love, to live a life under the promise of salvation. This pledge of a future

8 A similar thought is present in *Amoris laetitia*’s meditation on true love, which “hopes all things” (1 *Corinthians* 13:7), n° 116: “though things may not always turn out as we wish, God may well write straight with crooked lines and draw some good from the evil we endure in this world.” (The official English translation renders less literally: “may well make crooked lines straight.”)

which transforms the presence is the Gospel. It is the good news announced in assurance (*promissio*, ἐπαγγελία/*epangelía*, *Zusage*).

- **Gospel hope and Koranic hope.** Can one formulate a profile of the Christian hope over against an Islamic one? Here is a proposal. The function of hope in the Koranic proclamation is the assurance of an *eschatological possibility*: in order to balance the Koran's punishment accounts, God's servants are being motivated to keep striving because their case is not lost, they need not despair of the Last Judgement. By contrast, the function of hope in the Gospel proclamation is the conveyance of an *eschatological joy*: "being grasped" (*Philippians* 3:12, 8|9 καταλαμβάνεσθαι/*katalambánesthai*) by the dynamics of God's Kingdom, which has already begun.
- **Hope and dialogue.** A theological reflection on what Christians want in dialogue with Islam should draw on the category of hope. Hope seems to be a particularly helpful concept here for three reasons: hope designates, at the same time, dialogue's motivation, attitude and agenda.

1.4 Motivation: experiencing salvation

The motivation of any Christian activity is the grateful and cheerful experience of Christ's salvation which transforms human beings into missionary disciples of evangelisation, and that is, to let the joy of Christ's Kingdom become more present in people's lives. This is also the guiding principle of Pope Francis' Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*⁹ and of similarly programmatic words by his predecessors.¹⁰

1.5 Attitude: evangelising openness

Everything the Church does *qua* Church is evangelising. That implies that also her style is shaped by the Gospel. The style in which the Gospel evangelises is humble, respectful. It is not by chance that the Gospel is working precisely in this tenderness; there are epistemological and theological reasons for the non-violent character of the Christian witness.

- 1 **The Lord as Father.** God, as one encounters him in his Word, does not want to exert pressure to make his creatures love him; he rather desires to be acknowledged out of our own wish.
- 2 **Faith as a growing discovery of reality.** Evangelization is characterised by freedom also in another sense. It flows from the insight that believers are not in possession of their belief.¹¹ They have, rather, when coming to believe, come to share an understanding of reality; and both the expressions of this understanding and reality itself are open to further discovery. Believers do not claim that their knowledge is complete (*1 Corinthians* 13:12). This insight has 9|10 important consequences for their way of dealing with people who do not share their views. For believers, the experiences and outlooks of adherents of other religions can become, as the classical wording of Church documents has it, purification and enrichment.¹²
- 3 **Faith as a confident view of reality.** As witness, as word and example, as invitation and offer, any Christian proposition¹³ can only be made with a profound sense of the interlocutor's radical freedom; any type of violence would go against the message—and would shut down the space of faith: faith is a trusting view of reality. If one is made to accept a belief through pressure, one is neither believing out of trust nor out of one's understanding of reality.
- 4 **Believing in the history of salvation.** It is already the experience of Israel that God is at work in history, and that he is even working through creaturely acts that seem to go against his plan, order, law. The emblematic example is Joseph being sold by his brothers, but thus, ironically, not being eliminated, but put on the track of becoming their own life-saver (cf., *Genesis* 45:5). The Church's position is, consequently, hopeful belief within God's history, God's activity. This is why and how Christians are able to accept any historical situation: as an opportunity for God to reveal his works (cf., *John* 9:3). Everything will turn out to be a meaningful step towards the

9 *Evangelii gaudium* 176: "To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world." Cf., *ibid.*, 120.

10 *Evangelii nuntiandi* 18: "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new."—*Redemptoris missio* 15: "Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms." John Paul, in the same Encyclical, also warns of a type of "Kingdom-centredness" that would prescind from Christ and his proclamation (n° 17).

11 Benedict XVI, *Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, December 21, 2012.

12 *Dialogue and Mission* (1984) 21—Benedict XVI, *Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, December 21, 2012—*Evangelii gaudium* 250.

13 E.g., the last sentence of *Evangelii nuntiandi* 56 speaks of a *proporre*, where the English version has "presenting."

fulfilment of God’s Kingdom (cf., *Romans* 8:28, *Colossians* 1:20). For the history of salvation, the question is not whether something is legitimate or illegitimate¹⁴ but how any moment can become a *καιρός* (*kairós*) towards God’s fulfilment.

1.6 Opening: a theology of *apertura*

Those four traits fashion the attitude with which the Church sees and presents herself in the world. There is a positive view at the basis of each evangelising step. That is why any Church activity should be carried out with a specific attitude. Which attitude is that? A concept that paraphrases and, at the same time, orients Christian life is *apertura*.¹⁵ Meaning both ‘openness’ and ‘opening,’ it expresses the Gospel attitude as a multi-layer reality. *Apertura* is **10|11**

- *diákrisis*¹⁶—an ever new discernment of God’s activity in the world, overcoming prejudice and spotting emotional distortions in our perceptions and resolutions;
- *primerear*¹⁷—an unflinching generosity in proposing new paths of coming together and working together: the opening of doors and of initiatives;
- *parrhēsia*¹⁸—an open-hearted, prophetic¹⁹ courage to bring up, also in interreligious encounters, critical points like unfulfilled expectations for justice, and to bear witness to Christ the Saviour;²⁰
- “the art of accompaniment”²¹—that is, the humble and patient care for the other on his or her particular path of personal growth, “on a journey of openness to God.”²²

Regrettably, there have been times when people who have called themselves Christians had lost that *apertura*. They considered themselves entitled or obliged to use violence in the name of the Gospel, indeed, for the sake of the Gospel. That is a betrayal of the Gospel’s form and content—and to Christ’s own life. The explicit rediscovery of that evangelical openness took place under the title of ‘dialogue.’

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2 Dialogue: a Catholic history

The past half century as turned out to be a new phase in Catholic–Muslim relations. The phase’s dynamics are aptly captured by the concept of dialogue. For sure, it has not been an era of linear development; it all rather happened as many surprising moments. Reviewing the last 50 plus years, let us start at the beginning, that is, look at the first magisterial text which is expressly dialogical, then listen to the Roman pioneer for a theology of interreligious dialogue, and thus look at the Popes in dialogue with their different characteristics—truly different ones, as we shall see.

2.1 Scandalous dialogue: the humility of Christ

In Vatican II and in the magisterium of all Popes since *Ecclesiam suam* (1964), the Catholic Church has committed herself to dialogue: “The Church, therefore, exhorts her children, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in

14 *Dominus Iesus* 4 wants to reject the view of a “*de iure (or in principle)*” existence of more than one religion.

15 A more detailed unfolding of the meanings of *apertura* in: Felix Körner, “Apertura nella verità e nell’amore. *Evangelii gaudium* e il dialogo cattolico-musulmano,” in: *Gregorianum* 96 (2015), pp. 123–145, p. 130.

16 Διάκρισις: *Gaudium et spes* 4 uses “*perscrutare* the signs of the times”, the verb being the Vulgate’s rendering of διακρίνειν (*diakrínein*) in Matthew 16:3. Cf., Felix Körner, “Verständigung durch Vereinnahmung? Das Common Word der 138 Muslime in religionswissenschaftlicher und theologischer Sicht,” in: Christoph Böttigheimer and Florian Bruckmann (edd.), *Glaubensverantwortung im Horizont der „Zeichen der Zeit“* (Quaestiones Disputatae, vol. 248), Freiburg/Br. 2011, pp. 107–134, pp. 107–108.

17 *Evangelii gaudium* 24.

18 Παρρησία: the confidence and liberty in relationships and speech that characterised the first Christians; cf., Acts 2:29, 1 John 2:28.

19 There is another understanding of prophetic ministry, apart from that of those great figures in the history of salvation who are called prophets because, for example, they are carriers of revelation. Participating in Christ’s own prophetic mission, Christians are sent, in every generation, to voice a clear-sighted criticism of any problematic sociopolitical situation. Church documents call such statements “prophetic.” Cf., *Lumen gentium* 35, *Redemptoris missio* 43, *Evangelii gaudium* 219; also: Felix Körner, “Das Prophetische am Islam,” in: Mariano Delgado and Michael Sievernich (edd.), *Mission und Prophetie in Zeiten der Transkulturalität*, St. Ottilien 2011, pp. 234–248.

20 *Evangelii gaudium* 259, 253, 251.

21 *Evangelii gaudium* 169, cf., 24.

22 *Evangelii gaudium* 44.

witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these persons.”²³

The word ‘dialogue’ itself has a programmatic meaning. By evangelising in dialogue—rather than by imposition—Christians participate in Christ’s own meekness.²⁴ Consequently, it is part of Christian identity to constantly proceed dialogically. What does that mean?

“Before all else, dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude; a spirit which guides one’s conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person’s identity, modes of expression, and values. Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation (CIC 787, n. 1). Any sense of mission that is not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel.”²⁵

Like the Gospel of the crucified Messiah, the meekness of dialogue is scandalous. If the Church has found the truth, must she not make all people accept it, by all means? No. Even the Church keeps exploring and discovering, in the Spirit, the mystery of Christ (cf., John 16:13; Colossians 2:4). Indeed, one cannot ‘make’ people accept the truth; one can only testify to it. “The truth cannot impose **12|13** itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once gently and forcefully.”²⁶

2.2 Pioneering dialogue: Rossano

One of the Roman pioneers in the reflection on the theological challenges of dialogue was Monsignor Piero Rossano († 1991), exegete, theologian, secretary at the then so-called Secretariat for Non-Christians.²⁷ Rossano clarified the philosophical background and theological scope of the Church’s decision to introduce, during Vatican II, the word ‘dialogue’ into her vocabulary. He states that the words of *Nostra aetate*, though of extreme simplicity and brevity, carry in fact great theological weight. Rossano goes on to ask:

“Why? Because the the Council wanted to outline the essential features of the Church’s relations with non-Christian religions. Thus, the term and category of ‘dialogue’ came into the foreground. Unavoidably, words carry their weight, spur connotations. Until then, the Church’s habitual vocabulary was ‘proclamation,’ ‘teaching,’ ‘catechesis,’ ‘evangelization,’ ‘persuasion,’ ‘testimony.’ Now, ‘dialogue’ joined in. What was thus highlighted is the danger of overlooking the interlocutor, the inattention to the other’s values. What was introduced into Church vocabulary was in fact the category of reciprocity, of the existential relationship I—you—us. The awareness was brought to life that when we speak, we talk to someone anchored in a concrete existence. Dialogue thus imposed itself as method for mission, as a new style of the evangelizing sending of the Church; as a necessary and distinct addition to the various activities that arise from that ‘inner impulse of charity’ which moves the Church to meet all.”²⁸ **13|14**

23 *Nostra aetate* 2.

24 *Ecclesiam suam* 81.

25 *Dialogue and Mission* (1984) 29; cf., *ibid.*, 21: “a dialogical style of human relationships.”

26 *Dignitatis humanae* 1: “suaviter simul ac fortiter.”

27 Cf., Giulio Osto, *La testimonianza del dialogo. Piero Rossano tra Bibbia, religioni e cultura* (Dissertatio. Series Romana, vol. 60). Presentazione: Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, Prefazione: Felix Körner, Roma/Milano 2019.

28 The above text translates a section from Piero Rossano, “Il dialogo nella missione della Chiesa ad gentes” of 1990, republished in the collection of Rossano’s texts, *Teologia cristiana delle religioni e della missione ‘ad gentes’*, edited by Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Documenta Missionalia*, vol. 27, Rome 2002, pp. 409–421, pp. 410–411. The Italian original reads: “Perché? Perché si delineavano qui, nel quadro del Concilio, i tratti essenziali delle relazioni della Chiesa verso le religioni non cristiane e si mettevano in risalto il termine e la categoria del ‘dialogo’. Le parole hanno una loro carica e una evocazione ineliminabile. Entrando nel vocabolario ecclesiastico accanto ai termini consueti ‘annuncio’, ‘insegnamento’, ‘catechesi’, ‘evangelizzazione’, ‘persuasione’, ‘testimonianza’, il dialogo ne sottolineava una certa mancanza di sguardo sull’interlocutore e una disattenzione ai suoi valori. Introduceva in quel vocabolario la categoria della reciprocità, del rapporto esistenziale io-tu-noi, e rendeva viva la consapevolezza che quando si parla, si parla con qualcuno, ancorato all’esistenza concreta. Il dialogo si imponeva così come metodologia missionaria, come nuovo stile della missione evangelizzatrice della Chiesa, ma anche come esigenza di un *plus a sé stante* che veniva a collocarsi nella costellazione delle attività che nascono da quell’impulso interiore di carità che muove la Chiesa a incontrare tutti gli uomini.” Without saying it explicitly, Rossano alludes, in the last sentence, to *Ecclesiam suam* 64: “To this internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, We will apply the word ‘dialogue.’”

Piero Rossano's review of how dialogue came into Church language is self-critical. The Church, with all her missionary zeal, had not seen, he says, that the addressees of her proclamation are persons, too. Being interested in them must mean, then, not only getting our message across but welcoming what they are, what they have, what they offer. Only thus the Church can be the sign and the instrument for the growth of humanity's union, with each other and with God.²⁹

Rossano was also able to offer an answer the question how mission and dialogue should be correlated: "Briefly, *mission* suggests a mandate ('missus'), an announcing, direct evangelization, witness, an invitation to the Gospel, the foundation of new Christian communities. *Dialogue*, on the other hand, calls to mind *coexistence*, equality, cross-fertilizing conversation, the recognition of values on both sides, reciprocal enrichment, mutual change and growth."³⁰

One might add another clarification here: Mission is the reason for what the Church is doing: she is sent by Christ. Dialogue is her style: she acts in openness; and evangelisation is the aim: transforming the "temporal order" in the sense of the Gospel.³¹

2.3 Sacrificing dialogue: changing vocabulary

What should be said about attempts to systematically replace the term 'dialogue' with concepts like 'relations,' 'collaboration,' 'encounter' or 'confrontation'?³²

- First, a reminder is merited of the Conciliar discovery: the claim that dialogue is mere speaking, lacking concreteness and action, cannot be grounded in the founding texts. *Ecclesiam suam* invokes Christ's practical example and describes, as the climate of dialogue, friendship, indeed: service.³³ *Nostra aetate* urges Christians and Muslims "to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for 14|15 the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom" (n° 3).
- Second, in the reception of those impulses within other ecclesial texts, we find the terminologically consistent application of 'dialogue' as well, to living together and working together.³⁴
- Thirdly, the Church is not only encouraging individual events—"encounters"—but patiently conducted processes of mutual development.³⁵
- Fourthly, obviously Catholic practice shows that since Vatican II many interreligious collaborations were launched.³⁶
- Finally, proposals to sacrifice the word 'dialogue' as the orientation for the Church's mission are easily serving current identitarian, isolationist, tribalist and *we-versus-them* instincts.

Only in non-violence—through humble witness—can the dynamics of the Gospel transform human beings and communities; that is why "Interreligious dialogue is part of the church's evangelizing mission."³⁷

2.4 Wording dialogue: Muslims, or Islam?

The dialogue under study here is usually called 'Christian-Muslim,' or 'Muslim-Christian.' Another helpful terminology should, however, not be undervalued. One can helpfully also speak of 'Church-Islam' dialogue. It is enlightening to see whom we are encouraged to encounter by Vatican II. It is not only 'with Muslims' that we enter into dialogue, it is, surprisingly, 'with Islam': *Nostra aetate* speaks of "the faith of Islam" (*fides islamica*, n° 3). Two years later, the interreligious dialogue guidelines of 1967 *Towards the Meeting of Religions* explicated that

29 Cf., *Lumen gentium* 1.

30 Ibid., p. 423, from Rossano's previously unpublished text "Dialogue and Mission."

31 Cf., *Apostolicam actuositatem* 2.

32 E.g., Laurent Basanese in: George J. Marlin (ed.), *Christian Persecutions in the Middle East. A 21st Century Tragedy*, South Bend ID 2015, p. 243; Michael H. Weninger, "Die Herausforderungen im interreligiösen Dialog", in: *Katholisches Auslandssekretariat. Miteinander* 20/2 (2015), p. 21.

33 "Le climat du dialogue, c'est l'amitié. Bien mieux, le service. Tout cela, nous devons nous le rappeler et nous efforcer de le pratiquer selon l'exemple et le précepte que le Christ nous a laissés." *Ecclesiam suam* 87.

34 *Dialogue and Mission* 31–32.

35 *Ecclesiam suam* 81 n° 2. Felix Körner, "Das Dialogverständnis der katholischen Kirche. Eine theologische Grundlegung," in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 101 (2017), pp. 78–93.

36 E.g., <http://en.jrs.net>.

37 *Redemptoris missio* 55.

“Dialogue between *persons* of different religions is by no means extraordinary. It is, rather, the basis of all apostolic commitment; and in all times one has tried to undertake it, in different forms and with quite varied success. What, however, has begun with Vatican II is the proposed encounter of religions themselves and as such 15|16 with each other. It was in order to promote its realisation that Pope Paul VI has created, as one of the three Secretariats dedicated to dialogue with the whole world, the Secretariat for Non-Christians.”³⁸

What is the difference between dialogue with another religion, and dialogue with its members only? If we promote dialogue with another religion,

- we have the perspective that also larger communities will thus be motivated to develop constructive relations and overcome old enmities;
- we acknowledge that there is a tradition behind the individual believer, a tradition greater than any present—and possibly unconvincing—representation. Representativity is difficult in relations with all non-Catholic religious interlocutors, because they have mechanisms of representation different from the legal heritage onto which the Church of Rome was crafted;
- we acknowledge that our interlocutors belong to a religion, that is, they are part of an attempt at searching for, and living, divine truth. So, it is an expression of respect;
- we acknowledge that the interlocutor’s background has a history and is worthy of historical study;
- we can also, with the help of experts from our own side, put in better perspective and enrich any immediate self-presentation of a particular believer;
- we acknowledge others as carriers of collective memories, like ourselves; therefore, official invitations to the whole community, apologies, gestures of reconciliation and common declarations can be meaningful in order to overcome historical blockages;
- we acknowledge that other communities are, like ourselves, also institutions of learning, transmission, of shaping the minds and hearts of the next generation, and therefore can be addressed also with requests on how to present the past, the relations to others and issues like religious freedom. 16|17

Members of the Roman Catholic Church, with its clear structures of representation, sometimes complain that Islam has no such organs of universal authority. This is a problem; but it is not only with Islam that such challenges arise. Who speaks for ‘Pentecostalism,’ for example? Moreover, Catholic–Muslim encounters can have a motivating effect for Islamic institutions to clarify their structures of representation, and for Catholic representatives to revisit the relation between faith, community and society.

2.5 Five Popes: five charisms

Thus prepared, we can now look at five Roman Pontiffs who have come, each in his own characteristic way, to shape the Church’s age of dialogue.

- **John XXIII—respect.** Already as Apostolic Delegate in Turkey, Roncalli succeeded in transmitting to his interlocutors a Church that takes seriously the conscience and good will of others. In his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, ‘respect’ consequently became a *leitmotif*. The respectful attitude could then be rediscovered in Vatican II documents, especially in *Gaudium et spes* and in *Nostra aetate*’s “esteem” (n° 3) for Muslims.³⁹
- **Paul VI—realisation.** Paul *implemented*, in word, institution and gesture, many of his predecessor’s dialogical intuitions. In that sense, he ‘realised’ dialogue. He did so, however, also in another sense, which may be at the basis of his decisions. He *perceived* the relevance of encountering others: it is relevant as self-realisation of a Church that is the World’s “sacrament”

38 Secretariatus pro non-Christianis, *Vers la rencontre des religions: suggestions pour le dialogue*, Rome 1967; the Italian translation, *Guida al dialogo*, Brescia 1968, 91, reads: “Il dialogo tra *persone* di diverse religioni è ben lungi dall’essere cosa straordinaria. Esso è alla base di ogni apostolato e si è tentato di metterlo in atto in ogni tempo, sotto diverse forme, e con successi assai variabili. Ma quello che ha veramente avuto inizio con il concilio Vaticano II, è l’incontro proposto alle religioni stesse tra di loro, e in quanto tali. È proprio per promuoverne la realizzazione che papa Paolo VI ha creato il *Segretariato per i non-cristiani*, uno dei tre Segretariati destinati al dialogo con tutto il mondo.”

39 Felix Körner, “Was ist aus *Nostra Aetate* geworden? Relecture des römisch-katholischen Islamdialogs 2005–2015,” in: *CIBEDO-Beiträge* 3/2015, pp. 101–108, p. 106; Tobias Specker, “Hochachtung und Kritik. Das Verhältnis der katholischen Kirche zum Islam heute,” in: *Herder Korrespondenz Spezial* 2015 (“Religion unter Verdacht – wohin entwickelt sich der Islam?”), pp. 16–20.

(*Lumen Gentium* 1), as a new theological theme, and as the terrain for humanity's mutual understanding.

- **John Paul II—relation.** The Polish Pope is remembered by many members of the world's religions as a person who built bridges. The World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi on October 27, 1986 was unprecedented. With his own example of reconciliation—most striking was his visit to Mehmet Ali Ağca—he created an atmosphere of pro-active integration.
- **Benedict XVI—reflection.** Benedict will surely be remembered as a theologian of profound thinking and precise wording. His Regensburg formulations⁴⁰ were not the final word on the relation of reason and faith 17|18 in Christianity and Islam. It was during Benedict's pontificate that an international long term dialogue process between the Church and Islam was launched precisely as a platform to reflect together: the *Catholic-Muslim Forum*.⁴¹
- **Francis—representation.** In many of his gestures, Pope Francis is not only the face of Catholicism or the Church. Francis is the representative of all human beings of good will, the man standing for believing humanity. A clear example of this is his Encyclical on Ecology: at the end of *Laudato si'*, he proposes “two prayers. The first we can share with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus.”⁴² Francis not only voices what all human beings of good will⁴³ should hear. Rather, Pope Francis is thus becoming their voice. Islamic observers have long understood this new Pontifical role; the German Muslim website *islam.de* titled already in September 2013 that “Muslims in Germany and Pope condemn attack on Pakistani Protestant church.”⁴⁴

2.5.1 No deal-logue: growing in unity and diversity

What do Catholics actually want in interreligious dialogue? Speaking of a dialogue *agenda* seems self-contradictory. Dialogue is precisely not ‘deal-logue,’ having a plan and pushing it through. Dialoguing means being ready to adjust one's agenda on the way, to keep learning, to remain in *apertura*. In this sense, dialogue has no agenda. Still, those entering in a real dialogue have their intentions. Since dialogue is open to unexpected moves within history the interlocutors may discover then that their intentions are indeed ‘hopes.’ 18|19

The first Roman Catholic theologian to use the category of hope in a reflection on interreligious dialogue was Piero Rossano. In his keynote address during a Hindu-Christian “live-together” in 1974, he expressed “the aim of dialogue in five verbs”: To know the other deeply—to admire the riches of the various religions—to verify the sincerity, capacity and contribution of one's own religious commitment—and finally:

“To *Grow*, through the personal interaction, in my ‘personal concreteness,’ in my relationship and fellowship with the other, in the communion with the Absolute, which is unique and common, even if each one of us has the right to qualify it with different names. The hope of dialogue is the hope of growth in unity, and in diversity, towards God, in communion with our fellow men and God—in the hope that God will, in this way, lead all humankind towards a sane healthy world society, where all share his abundant goodness. For this end shall we invoke, when opening a dialogue, the intervention of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁵

40 “Glaube, Vernunft und Universität. Erinnerungen und Reflexionen,” *Lecture to representatives of science*, September 12, 2006. Cf., Felix Körner, “Vernunft und Glaube in Christentum und Islam. Problemskizze und Begriffsvorschlag,” in: *Lebendige Seelsorge* 64 (2013), pp. 227–236.

41 Felix Körner, “Das erste Seminar im katholisch-muslimischen Forum. Theologische und islamwissenschaftliche Auswertung,” in: Mariano Delgado and Guido Vergauwen (edd.), *Interkulturalität. Begegnung und Wandel in den Religionen* (Religionsforum, vol. 5), Stuttgart 2009, pp. 229–248.; Felix Körner, “Hoffnung auf Verständigung. Zum zweiten Mal traf sich das Katholisch-Muslimische Forum,” in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 66 (2012), pp. 193–198.

42 *Laudato si'* 246.

43 *Laudato si'* 62.

44 September 23, 2013, <http://islam.de/22873>. [The bombers] made themselves enemies of Islam: “‘Zum Feind des Islam gemacht.’ Muslime in Deutschland und Papst verurteilen Anschlag auf protestantische Kirche in Pakistan mit über 80 Tote[n].” I am grateful to Prof. Rotraud Wielandt, Bamberg, for drawing my attention to this statement.

45 Piero Rossano, “Dialogue in Thailand, South Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Southern India. Report of a journey,” in: *Secretariat pro non-Christianis. Bulletin* 9/25 (1974), pp. 67, 68. Rossano had “mankind” and “all men share” where I wrote “humankind” and “all share.”

In the light of this historical review we are now ready to look into the future.

3 Church–Islam dialogue: a new agenda

Speaking for today, what is the Catholic agenda in dialogue? We have already seen that wording like ‘agenda’ does not exhibit the right attitude. If we do dialogue, what we have is: hope. The dynamic of hope has, in Church–Islam dialogue, a twofold role. For one, ‘hope’ is the anticipated joy that motivates and orients all Christian action towards the true humanity manifest in Christ—out of this hope, his disciples venture towards ever new steps of reconciliation. Then, however, there is another dynamic of hope at work in dialogue. To dialogue means to enter a process of continuous learning and ever new discerning, precisely because of faith’ truth claim: it wants to be a type of contact with reality.⁴⁶ Even our desires and wishes, our agendas might change in the course of this process. Thus, Christians will also list their ‘hopes,’ that is, the objectives they want to achieve in dialogue; and, with that, they will already know that not all of their intentions will come true: ‘hopes,’ in this sense, are the Church’s desires, expressed in prayer and action, and with the awareness that human freedom and God’s wisdom may well have things turn out quite differently. Still, Christian faith is built on the hope **19|20** that even where human hopes seem thwarted, God’s plan will prove good; wise “governance”⁴⁷ will lead all things to fulfilment in his kingdom. In the light of this, one can answer questions about the Church’s agenda in dialogue with Islam by stating the Church’s *hopes* for it.

3.1 Solutions

Societies with a certain level of religious plurality encounter problems that religiously homogenous nations do not face similarly. Four examples from today’s Germany may help to identify the appropriate categories.

- a Facilitation.** May male minors be circumcised without a medical indication justifying the operation? Here, a dialogue is needed since a balancing of the various legally protected interests involved presupposes a process of solution-oriented discussion. The decision-making authority is, however, not a religious community. It is, rather, the state. Therefore, the Church can be a partner in this precise discussion only as observer, advisor and facilitator.
- b Criteria.** Can Muslim communities get air-time in public broadcasting channels of majority Christian countries? Should, more precisely, imams get the possibility to speak a prime time Thought of the Day, which has so far been shared between Protestant and Catholic theologians as a brief proclamatory programme? Here, the churches will be immediate dialogue partners. They can also help formulate, out of their experience in broadcasting and negotiating, plausible standards. The criterion would be how far the Muslim communities succeed in forming their media representatives to find a language that can be heard, not as aggressive towards a non-believer but as enriching for all.
- c Objectification.** Do Koran classes promote violent behaviour? Here, interreligious dialogue can be a key factor for introducing, also to a wider public, the necessary distinctions in order to build trust and get the societal debates to a matter-of-fact level. It is not a particular book, not a particular religion that automatically produces violence; rather, specific socio-political conditions and constrictions make people tend towards violence and seek grounding in an identity promising tradition. Good arguments **20|21** about authentic religion will be useful here, but more importantly societal integration and an education that helps people to develop self-respect and, from there, respect of others.
- d Text books.** How do teachers in confessional religious education classes, and how do the text-books speak, about the religion of others? Here a huge field of revisions needs expert work; and that is true of Christian presentations of Islam, and of just about any other country in the world, too. The presentation of the other’s religion in schools needs to

⁴⁶ Cf. also, Benedict XVI, *Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, December 21, 2012.

⁴⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1884, cfr. Felix Körner, “Gottes Weltregierung im Prozess der Geschichte. Handlungstheorien bei Wolfhart Pannenberg und in der islamischen Theologie”, in: Gunther Wenz (ed.), *Offenbarung als Geschichte. Implikationen und Konsequenzen eines theologischen Programms* (Pannenberg-Studien, vol. 4), Göttingen 2018, pp. 167–203.

- unmask societal prejudice,
- promote friendship, reconciliation and collaboration,
- be supported by matter-of-fact historians,
- be counter-checked by representatives of the religious community studied,
- report, apart from the normative theological evaluation the confessional religious educators want to convey, present the others' views appropriately, marked out as, for example, 'Muslims believe,' or, 'Christians say.'

Also in circumstances differing from the above-mentioned ones, the Catholic Church has a right and duty to dialogue. Also in international contexts, also in multilateral dialogues of religious and other representatives, Church views need to be voiced because of their inspiring force.⁴⁸ They are 'animating' in a multiple sense: they propose action, they encourage, they make people listen to their ultimate destiny, they can become the 'soul' (*anima*) of a culture.⁴⁹ Christian views often offer a refreshingly different language and adduce counter-cultural positions; they present a view of the human being in its fullness, a perspective beyond party politics and they speak out of an unparalleled experience of negotiating with political powers.

A solution-oriented dialogue is, however, also possible in bilateral constellations between Muslim and Christian theologians. Mostly, the religious leaders, thinkers and teachers involved have no immediate political power; but they have influence. The solutions that a bilateral interreligious dialogue can aim at will always have an aspect of religious teaching. In 2015, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb called for a reform of Islamic teaching.⁵⁰ 'Teaching' may refer to style—pedagogy—more than to content—doctrine. So what can one expect? A change of Islamic core doctrine is less probable. For example, Muslims are unlikely to change their presentation of Jesus as one prophet within the series which ends in Muḥammad. It is not a reform of doctrine, that can be expected, but a reform of education. In the example of prophetology, Christians may hope that, in the future, Muslims point out that the Church's view of Jesus differs from the Muslim dogma: for Christians, Jesus' claim is decisive that with his coming God's Kingdom has come. Sheikh al-Tayeb, however, mentioned, in his proposal for a teaching reform, also that "bad interpretations" need to be overcome; that is, an understanding of the canonical texts that promotes exclusion and violence. Also, solution-oriented dialogues between Muslim and Christian representatives can usefully discuss societal and even political issues. The dialogue's outcome will not yet represent the end of the political discussion; but if in this context a common view can be reached and formulated, political solutions may be facilitated, given the expertise, reputation and authority of many religious representatives.

3.2 Background

Even apart from formulated—or indeed, implemented—solutions, dialogues have, however, significant effects. When Muslim and Christian representatives discuss challenges of societal co-existence, they come to understand the ideas behind the others' practice. Under the surface of a ritual preoccupation, there may be a wealth of wisdom; under the surface of custom, there may also be a prejudice or misunderstanding that is in need of clarification. In any case, the discovery of the other's 'world' has an enriching effect: one gets new information; but more than that, one also comes to appreciate another way to see the totality of life, one may discover a certain consistency in it and one may learn the humility to accept the fact that one's own viewpoint is not the only possible way of seeing things.

Critical questions, particularly referring to the consistency of the other's usage of texts and scholarly evidence, can have a purifying role here; but the understanding of another religion is necessarily limited. An outsider will never be able to draw doctrinal or ethical conclusions for the other believer. Such reasoning requires the intuition that comes only with the communitarian and personal experience that one has only as an adherent of that specific religion. It is also impossible to express the

48 Cf., already Paul VI in his *Address to Participants of the Congress organised by the Secretariat for Non-Christians*, October 5, 1972: "Ne croyez-vous pas que l'humanité a besoin aujourd'hui plus que jamais de trouver une aide et une orientation près des hommes foncièrement religieux? Vous le savez, les religions contribuent à la paix, à la fraternité, à la justice; elles inspirent la morale, elles suscitent l'espérance. Même les rapports sociaux deviennent difficiles lorsque n'intervient plus cette référence aux forces vives de l'esprit, dont les religions sont l'expression la plus haute et la plus universelle."

49 Francis, *Address to the European Parliament*, Strasbourg, November 25, 2014.

50 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31580130>.

belief of the other in one's own language, if that language is linked to 22|23 a contrasting view. That is why one cannot faithfully express, say, Christ's divine Sonship in Koranic terms. What is, however, possible in understanding the other believer, is marking the line where the difference begins. The Koran, for that matter, presents a view of Jesus that is at variance with the apostolic witness. For the Koran, the criterion to evaluate any claim at revelation is, not Jesus, but the Koran itself.

Throughout history, different cultures of religion have reached different stages of refinement, different levels of profundity and different degrees of subtlety. If a quality gap becomes palpable between Muslim and Christian theologians, two guidelines may come into play. Respect is not only a basic principle for human conduct and for a sustained openness in exchange; it is also in place because the present situation of the other's theological culture does not reflect the other's religion in its essence—there have been other days with different distributions of academic excellence. There is a further side to the necessary respect in interreligious encounters; it will be presented in the section following now.

3.3 Self-understanding

Respectful human encounters facilitate a fruitful transport of ideas from one religious culture to another. In order to indicate the spectre of themes, one rather general theme and a specific topic will be named: the general reassurance that critical study is no danger to spiritual depth in your adherence; a transfer of methodologies, especially when it comes to hermeneutical intuitions in dealing with foundational texts.

There are, moreover, other types of transformation of one's own religious self-understanding out of respectful interreligious encounter. I understand my partner in dialogue more and more as "other believer." The Post-Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* italicised the *autre croyant* (19), evidently hinting at the expression's *double entendre* as 'someone holding another belief, different from my own' and 'another human being who also has, like myself, a belief.'⁵¹ In a profound encounter with the religious other, there are dynamics of exemplarity and competition, of attraction and repulsion, of self-discovery by contrast and by similarity. One discovers one's own religion more profoundly, but, more generally, one also learns to see life differently. For the dimensions involved, three theological formulae offered by Benedict XVI may be recorded.

- a **Manner.** Quoting Gregory VII and addressing Muslims, Benedict 23|24 professed that "we believe in one God, albeit in a different manner."⁵² The formulation says that "we"—as Muslims and Christians—live in reference and reverence of one and the same God; one might add that difference in "manner" is not only in ritual or ethos but also in the theological point that for Christians the "manner of belief" itself is, as the Holy Spirit, God, and insofar the difference in religious practice has repercussions to the One in whom Muslims and, on the other hand, Christians believe.
- b **Dimensions.** In order to describe interreligious dialogue structurally, Benedict used two metaphors, which he called dimensions: face to face—and side by side; that is, on the one hand, "sharing our spiritual riches, speaking of our experience of prayer and contemplation, and expressing to one another the joy of our encounter with divine love." On the other hand, the side by side dimension means to "work together effectively for peace and mutual understanding, and so give a convincing witness before the world."⁵³ The questions raised and the themes touched upon can, however, have a further effect. Thus we are opened up to a third dimension of interreligious dialogue: out of the encounter, one can see the interest and need to go back to

⁵¹ Cf., already John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Asia* 31.

⁵² *Address at the Religious Affairs Directorate 'Diyanet,' Ankara, Turkey, November 28, 2006.* The quote is from *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 148, column 451: "Hanc itaque charitatem nos et vos specialibus nobis quam cæteris gentibus debemus, qui unum Deum, licet diverso modo, credimus et confitemur, qui eum Creatorem sæculorum et gubernatorem hujus mundi quotidie laudamus et veneramus." A footnote to *Nostra ætate* 3 already referred to this passage, since the Declaration's text had drawn on Gregory's presentation of the Islamic creed. On this, cf., Felix Körner, "Wir glauben und bekennen denselben Gott, wenn auch auf verschiedene Weise. Einheit Gottes in der klassisch-islamischen Theologie und im Denken Wolfhart Pannenberg," in: Gunther Wenz (ed.), *Vom wahrhaft Unendlichen. Metaphysik und Theologie bei Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Pannenberg-Studien, vol. 2), Göttingen 2016, pp. 325–351; Felix Körner, "Glauben Christen und Muslime an denselben Gott?," in: Thomas Marschler and Klaus von Stosch (edd.), *Verlorene Strahlkraft? Welches Glaubenszeugnis heute gefragt ist*, Freiburg/Br. 2018, pp. 41–51.

⁵³ Twickenham, London, September 17, 2010.

one's own tradition and study it again, in the new light received from dialogue. One might speak of a 'back to back' phase of interreligious dialogue.⁵⁴—The wording 'back to back' is suggestive, because it implies trust, and a complementarity of different perspectives; the Turkish word for 'the person standing back to back with another' is *arkadaş*—it is the word for 'friend.' The self-distinction that happens in a **24|25** respectful interreligious dialogue leads to the perspective that "we can be friends in difference."⁵⁵

- c** **Discovery.** A third motif stressed by Benedict XVI can be rediscovered at the basis of Pope Francis' teaching. In *Evangelii gaudium*, he warns of the totalitarian project of those who try to reach a compromise in issues which in fact "transcend them and of which they are not the masters. True openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being 'open to understanding those of the other party' and 'knowing that dialogue can enrich each side'."⁵⁶ It seems that Benedict XVI, in his meditation on the epistemology of interreligious dialogue, which became his last substantial theological proposition as Pontiff, was able to describe at such depth the mystery of believing precisely because he was reflecting his own faith in the light of other believers: one's belief does not depend on one's private choice, believing is not an arbitrary decision,⁵⁷ it is, rather—one might conclude positively—an adoring discovery. **25|26**

Several present day occidental trends in the study of religion use the enriching force of Muslim theology for a better understanding of the Christian faith. That can be said of such differing approaches as Comparative Theology,⁵⁸ and the intertextual studies of the project *Corpus Coranicum*.⁵⁹

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- 54 Cf., Felix Körner, "Rücken an Rücken. Die dritte Dimension interreligiösen Miteinanders," in: George Augustin, Sonja Sailer-Pfister and Klaus Vellguth (edd.), *Christentum im Dialog. Perspektiven christlicher Identität in einer pluralen Gesellschaft* (Festschrift Günter Riße), Freiburg/Br. 2014, pp. 235–242.
- 55 Felix Körner, "Das erste Seminar im katholisch–muslimischen Forum" (above, footnote 41), p. 248; idem, "JHWH, Gott, Allāh: Drei Namen für dieselbe Wirklichkeit?" in: *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 158 (2010), pp. 31–38, p. 38.
- 56 *Evangelii gaudium* 251; the English rendering of "valori che li trascendono" as "greater values" is rather bland. The two quotes in the text are from *Redemptoris Missio* 56.
- 57 *Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, December 21, 2012. "Es wäre zu wenig, wenn der Christ mit seinem Identitätsentscheid sozusagen vom Willen her den Weg zur Wahrheit abbrechen würde. Dann wird sein Christsein etwas Willkürliches, bloß Positives. Er rechnet dann offenbar gar nicht damit, daß man es in der Religion mit Wahrheit zu tun bekommt. Demgegenüber würde ich sagen, der Christ habe das große Grundvertrauen, ja, die große Grundgewißheit, daß er ruhig ins offene Meer der Wahrheit hinausfahren könne, ohne um seine Identität als Christ fürchten zu müssen. Gewiß, wir haben die Wahrheit nicht, aber sie hat uns: Christus, der die Wahrheit ist, hat uns bei der Hand genommen, und wir wissen auf dem Weg unseres Ringens um Erkenntnis, daß seine Hand uns festhält."—"sarebbe troppo poco se il cristiano con la sua decisione per la propria identità interrompesse, per così dire, in base alla sua volontà, la via verso la verità. Allora il suo essere cristiano diventerebbe qualcosa di arbitrario, una scelta semplicemente fattuale. Allora egli, evidentemente, non metterebbe in conto che nella religione si ha a che fare con la verità. Rispetto a questo direi che il cristiano ha la grande fiducia di fondo, anzi, la grande certezza di fondo di poter prendere tranquillamente il largo nel vasto mare della verità, senza dover temere per la sua identità di cristiano. Certo, non siamo noi a possedere la verità, ma è essa a possedere noi: Cristo, che è la Verità, ci ha presi per mano, e sulla via della nostra ricerca appassionata di conoscenza sappiamo che la sua mano ci tiene saldamente. L'essere interiormente sostenuti dalla mano di Cristo ci rende liberi e al tempo stesso sicuri."—Again, the English translation does not do full justice to the original: "it would be too little for the Christian, so to speak, to assert his identity in a such a way that he effectively blocks the path to truth. Then his Christianity would appear as something arbitrary, merely propositional. He would seem not to reckon with the possibility that religion has to do with truth. On the contrary, I would say that the Christian can afford to be supremely confident, yes, fundamentally certain that he can venture freely into the open sea of the truth, without having to fear for his Christian identity. To be sure, we do not possess the truth, the truth possesses us: Christ, who is the truth, has taken us by the hand, and we know that his hand is holding us securely on the path of our quest for knowledge. Being inwardly held by the hand of Christ makes us free and keeps us safe[.]"
- 58 Francis X. Clooney, "Comparative Theology," in: John B. Webster, Kathryn Tanner and Iain Torrance (edd.), *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, Oxford 2007, pp. 653–669. Klaus von Stosch, *Komparative Theologie als Wegweiser in der Welt der Religionen*, Paderborn 2012.—Catholic theology should not see the approach as doctrinally problematic. If there is a fundamental problem in Comparative Theology, it is perhaps in its lack of hermeneutic, historical and holistic reflection: a religion is not made up of fixed positions; theology, rather needs to explain faith's contemporary meaning, is therefore in constant development and tries to understand each of its propositions as being part of a comprehensive view.
- 59 Cf., <https://corpuscoranicum.de>; Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang*, Berlin 2010.

3.4 Proclamation

There is, beyond the finding of practical solutions, beyond the understanding of the other's background, beyond the deeper discovery of reality through interreligious encounter, another intention Christians can have when engaging in dialogue with Muslims. Again, this intention is to be characterised as a hope; and the category of hope acquires a particular meaning here. People who have experienced the life changing love of Christ, naturally want others to have the same experience.⁶⁰ It is, therefore, an inherent hope of all Christian existence. It is not embarrassing to cherish this hope; it is not in need of hiding. In fact, many Muslims equally hope for their Christian interlocutors to discover the Koran as 26|27 God's definitive revelation. Christians, precisely because they share in the Church's dynamics of hope, can shape their evangelising activities in 'openness.' This has four practical consequences.

- a **Hope in us.** "In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is in you. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Following the oft-quoted verse, Monsignor Piero Rossano wrote a *Brief presentation of the Catholic Faith*, entitled *The Hope which is in us*. The 1967 text remains exemplary. Its language echoes spirituality, even enthusiasm, but never acquires a proselytising tone. The presentation is not simply confronting the reader with the facts of the faith but is an invitation to follow a certain development. It gives to the Christian hope an understandable, yet original structure as "*L'evento cristiano—la sapienza cristiana—la vita cristiana.*"⁶¹ Today's presentations would be well advised to take similar roads: not trying to decide the soteriological status of other believers and, belief systems and religious traditions but still having an alert sense of the interlocutors' questions and ways of thinking and of presenting their views. There is, for example, a deep theological wisdom in starting with Christianity as an event. Evidently, behind that is the clear decision not to start from scripture, dogma, community or mystical experience.
- b **Transparency.** Another important factor that needs to shape the style of proclamation within interreligious dialogue contexts—and elsewhere—is the procedural clarity. 'Openness' is also transparency in action.⁶² Interlocutors must not turn to proclamatory moves—be they actions or words—without telling their partners beforehand what they are about to do. If one has hope, in the Christian sense of God's Kingdom growing, one will not try to precipitate that growth with a cheap trick. If one wants to speak to persons and present a conviction vis-à-vis their free ability to understand it, one will not manipulate them subconsciously. So, while the hope for fruitful Gospel proclamation is the Christians' *inherent* hope, it is not the Christians' *implemented* hope.
- c **Faithfulness.** From others in their otherness a lot can be learned. It would be a lack of humanity, humility, generosity, of openness and faithfulness for 27|28 a Christian to discontinue friendly contact with someone because he or she does not join the Church.
- d **Collaboration.** Proclamation must not be distorted by a desire to win; as if the other person or group were defeated by a conversion to Christ, and as if the Church was meant to produce her own success story. Part of the hope dynamics in proclamation is to acknowledge in sober realism that not all addressees accept the proclamation; and in view of the Cross, Christians may hope that even rejection will prove to have its meaning, will bear its fruit. It is a typically Catholic attitude to take also non-Christians, also persons who are, to all knowledge, no candidates for baptism as possible partners in the Church's evangelising project of the world. How?

60 This is the foundational dynamic of *Evangelii gaudium* (cf., 8.120). In terms of the contrast between false and true, that hope is already explicit in *Ecclesiam suam* 107: "there is but one true religion, the religion of Christianity. It is our hope that all who seek God and adore Him may come to acknowledge its truth." Piero Rossano, in the address quoted above (footnote 45), had listed as his fourth, of five, dialogue aims: "To *Communicate*, to share, in a mutual process of giving and receiving, broadening the platform of the human communion, and stimulating the blossoming of the differences. I am conscious that in so doing, as a Christian, I am opening the way for the Gospel, but I open also a way for my partner Hindu, or Moslem, or Buddhist, in a real twoway traffic which is enriching and liberating on both sides" (p. 68).

61 *La speranza che è in noi. Breve presentazione della fede cattolica*, Fossano 1968, online: <http://www.pierorossano.net/sez1104916681/sez1105353198/RossanoSperanzalt.pdf/>. The structuring headings cannot be translated easily; the official English version reads, less elegantly, "Christianity as 'Event'—Christian Wisdom—The Christian life."

62 Francis, *Address to seminarians and novices*, July 6, 2013.

3.5 Values

The Church hopes for “the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel.”⁶³ Not only Catholics contribute to the realisation of this project. Its detailed formulation is Catholic Social Teaching. Not only official Church documents⁶⁴ state its content: scholarly and political contributions by Catholics also express and develop the Catholic vision of a just society. What is thus articulated of Christian ethics has become an inspiration and orientation also for non-Christians. The particular ethical accentuations of Catholic social ethics can be termed its “principles”⁶⁵—and the attitudes at their basis its “values.”⁶⁶ The category of value can, however, also have a slightly different meaning in Catholic ethics: Church documents have come to speak of “Gospel values”⁶⁷ and “values of 28|29 the Kingdom.”⁶⁸ A central point of specifying Christian “values” and “principles” is to express the Christian ethical vision beyond the precincts of Church language and Gospel faith. Another such category is: biblical anthropology.⁶⁹

The strength of such expressions is obvious for societal orientation and inspiration. Still, formulations of Christian ethical principals, values and anthropologies also have a problematic side. Being general intuitions, they are necessarily vague, sometimes even banal: they fail to express where the Gospel challenges humanity to live “values that go beyond current values.”⁷⁰ Also, they lack legal authority—and as cognitive concepts from moral philosophy, they have little motivating force and self-adjusting capacity.

Claiming that “values” are the Church’s fundamental message would be reducing Christianity to general precepts; to precepts everyone can share, indeed, everyone can see—and perhaps realise—without Christ. The Christian faith, by contrast, is first of all the encounter with the Risen Lord. This encounter has ever new effects. Through such encounters, Christ liberates people and calls them ever anew. Therefore, ethical concepts cannot claim to translate the full meaning of Christianity. Values cannot replace other forms of the Christian witness. For the baptised, the celebration of the Pascal Mystery is the ever productive grand narrative that animates the growing communion of humanity with God; it is the sacrament that nourishes and orients Christian lives. It is the source of the Church’s ethical intuition and energy. This living reality, however, makes Christians discover moral aspirations—‘values,’ ‘principles,’ ‘our anthropology’—in which others can participate, even if they would substantiate them differently. Therefore, the formulation of ethical priorities, accents, concerns and hopes play a vital role in interreligious dialogue. Christians want to discuss, with people of other faiths, the Gospel values. A dialogue on values will surely be conducted in the hope that others may share—or come to share—those values; and, indeed, that others may contribute to the realisation of better living conditions, just societies, a more human world, according to God’s will.

63 *Apostolicam actuositatem* 2.

64 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Rome 2004.

65 The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* specifies the principles of personality (dignity), solidarity (the common good) and subsidiarity (participation): n° 160.

66 The Official formulations of Catholic Social Teaching state, as core values: truth, freedom, and justice—under the leadership of the criterion of love (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 197).

67 This is *Redemptoris missio*’s wording: “The Church serves the kingdom by spreading throughout the world the ‘gospel values’ which are an expression of the kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan. It is true that the inchoate reality of the kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live ‘gospel values’ and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. *Jn* 3:8). But it must immediately be added that this temporal dimension of the kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness” (20). The Encyclical had already specified as the “gospel values which Jesus made incarnate in his own life”: peace, justice, brotherhood and concern for the needy (n° 3). Ultimately, “gospel values” is a new rendering of a formulation of *Evangelii nuntiandi*: “In this same modern world, on the other hand, and this is a paradox, one cannot deny the existence of real steppingstones to Christianity, and of evangelical values” (n° 55).

68 Cf. *Redemptoris missio* 17: “such ‘values of the kingdom’ as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc.”

69 Pope Benedict XVI’s “Menschenbild” in *Deus caritas est* 11 is, not very elegantly, translated as: “image of man.” — “The first novelty of biblical faith consists (...) in its image of God. The second, essentially connected to this, is found in the image of man.”

70 *Evangelii nuntiandi* 21.