

FROM HERESY TO RELIGION: VATICAN II AND ISLAM

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While it is perhaps not pleasant to look at past opinions of Christians regarding Islam, if we examine a few of these it will help us to see how long the journey has been to reach the point we are at today.

Some past opinions on Islam

A 'monk of France', probably Hugh of Cluny (1049-1119), wrote to the Muslim king of Saragossa, Muqtadir Billah, a letter inviting the ruler to embrace Christianity. In it he spoke about Islam as a deception, attributing it to the work of Satan. He stated: 'Satan... deceived the children of Ishmael in regard to the Prophet whose mission they acknowledged and thereby drew many souls to the punishment of Hell.'¹ Though the tone of the letter is otherwise fairly friendly, this way of seeing Islam as something devilish and the Prophet of Islam as an instrument of Satan obviously produced a strong reaction. The ruler did not reply himself, but entrusted this task to a scholar, Abû l-Walîd Sulaymân b. Khalaf al-Bâjî, known for his skill in polemics. Al-Bâjî gives all the main arguments of Islam against Christianity and ends, in his turn, by appealing to his correspondent to be converted to Islam; with little success, one would be inclined to think. From the Christian side, Islam was seen as something diabolical since it prevented God's saving work from being accomplished. This was an opinion quite common in missionary circles up to the Second Vatican Council.

An earlier writer, George Hamartolos, this time not in the West but in the Byzantine Empire, compiled a history of mankind from its origins to the middle of the 9th Century. He dedicates one chapter, chapter 235, to Islam. He compares Islam unfavourably to Christianity, stating that it is a religion which springs from a false prophet. 'These foggy-minded and stupid men', he writes, 'refuse openly to examine the truest faith, sacred and guaranteed by God, while these hardened wretches accept the forgery to which this swindler gave the appearance of true religion'². At least this writer does not invoke the influence of Satan, but he does give evidence of prejudice born of ignorance. As Gaudeul remarks: 'George (Hamartolos) did not know Islam, understood no Arabic, repeated what his predecessors had said but with such hatred, contempt and self-righteousness, that his readers took it for granted that what he said was true and passed it on to future generations'³. This attitude is unfortunately still found in polemical booklets from both sides.

Turning to someone who did have direct experience of Muslims and Islam, John of Damascus (675-753), we see that in the first century after its rise Islam was treated as a breakaway from Christianity. Muhammad was said to have been influenced by Christians. John says that Muhammad ‘supposedly encountered an Arian monk’ (other authors, with greater likelihood, speak about encounters with a Nestorian) and ‘formed a heresy of his own’.⁴ John, living under Muslim rule, shows that his information about Islam is generally correct and gives evidence of knowledge of the Qur'an. Yet each element of the religion is taken separately and not evaluated within the context of the religion as a whole. In fact it could be said that Islam is not described in itself at all, but is only considered in its relationship to Christianity. It is certainly unjustified to consider Islam as a Christian heresy. As defined by Canon Law heresy is ‘the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith’ (c.751). To become a heretic one must first belong to the Church. This obviously does not apply to Muhammad.

Another categorisation of Muslims, as unbelievers, is found in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. He was naturally inclined to reserve the term ‘believer’ to one who shared the Christian faith. Thomas, as a Dominican friar, was requested to compose a work to help those of his order who were preaching to Jews and Muslims. This was the origin of his *Summa contra gentiles*. He admitted that he knew very little about Islam, so he concentrated mainly on the way of presenting the elements of Christian faith to people who did not accept the authority of the Christian Scriptures. In the first three sections of this work, dealing with God in Himself, God as Creator, and with the moral life as the way to God, Thomas uses rational arguments for he is speaking about truths accessible to human reason. Only in the final section, when treating the specifically Christian Mysteries, are the Scriptures used, for these truths can be known solely by revelation. It should be noted that Thomas is not trying to prove these truths, but rather to demonstrate that they are not contradictory.

Thomas outlines this method explicitly in a shorter treatise, *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochenum*. He writes: ‘First of all I wish to warn you that in disputations with unbelievers about articles of the Faith, you should not try to prove the Faith by necessary reasons. Just as our Faith cannot be proved by necessary reasons, because it exceeds the human mind, so because of its truth it cannot be refuted by any necessary reason. So any Christian disputing about the articles of the Faith should not try to prove the Faith, but defend the Faith.’⁵ What is to be observed here is that Thomas is not treating Islam as a corrupt version of Christianity but, implicitly at least, as a separate religion. In fact his writings could be considered the foundation for the position which classifies Islam as a natural religion.

In contrast to Christianity with its mysteries and dogmas, Voltaire exalted Islam as a natural religion accessible to all. He considered Muhammad to have been a great philosopher. Similarly Thomas Carlyle presented Islam as the work of a genius. This is surely reductionist, an over-simplification. Yet some Catholic theologians are also inclined to treat Islam as a natural religion. What they probably mean is that this religion remains, in its approach to God, at the level of what can be known by reason alone. George Anawati has qualified this assertion. For him Islam can be said to be a natural religion in so far as the truths it professes are accessible to reason, and yet, for Muslims at least, it is a revealed

religion since they adhere to these truths as being received from God.⁶ This would seem to correspond exactly to the Islamic view. Muslims do indeed say that Islam is a natural religion, the religion of *fitra*, that is the religion given by God to mankind at their very creation. The prophets have been sent simply to remind them of this religion. This prophetic mission culminates in Muhammad establishing Islam as the definitive universal religion.

Some positive appreciations of Islam

Not all past opinions of Islam have been so negative. The position adopted by the Catholicos Timothy I in Baghdad (728-823) is well known.⁷ Asked explicitly by the Caliph Al-Mahdi to give his opinion about Muhammad, Timothy's reply was 'Muhammad is worthy of praise by all reasonable people, O my Sovereign. He walked in the path of the prophets, and trod in the tracks of the lovers of God'.⁸ Timothy's reasons for this affirmation are that Muhammad taught his followers the doctrine of the unity of God, detaching them from idolatry and polytheism; he drove people away from bad works and brought them to good works; he also taught about God, His Word and His Spirit.

Coming to more recent times let me mention Louis Massignon (1883-1962). This distinguished Islamicist, having recovered his own Christian faith through contact with Islam, devoted his life to presenting the true faith of Islam to the West. He will be considered in the chapter on 'Prophets of dialogue', but here it can be noted that he certainly helped to bring about a new vision of Islam in Catholic circles although his own position, as we shall see, was not adopted by the conciliar texts.

The teaching of Vatican II on Islam

Vatican II marks a radical change in attitude of the Church towards other religions, and in particular Islam. Its references to this religion are found in two documents, *Lumen Gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Nostra Aetate* (The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions).

It has often been said that the Second Vatican Council spoke about Muslims but not about Islam. This is true insofar as the Council did not intend to give a full description of Islam, nor to enter into a detailed discussion of what could be conceived as positive and negative aspects of this religion. The statement in *Lumen Gentium* (LG 16) is very succinct and thus can be quoted in its entirety: 'But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day.' In some ways paragraph 3 of *Nostra Aetate* could be considered an extended commentary on these lines, going on to draw out some practical consequences for relations between Christians and Muslims.

It should be noted, nevertheless, that *Nostra Aetate* does speak about religions, and these general affirmations should be held to refer also to Islam. The religions, as has been said, provide answers for the fundamental questions of human existence (cf. NA 1). Nothing that is true and holy in religions is rejected by the Church. Consequently the

Church gives encouragement to its members to enter into a dialogue of exchange and collaboration with the members of other religions (cf. NA 2). On this basis then an examination can be made as to what the Council says, at least by way of implication, about Islam as a religion.

Islam as a monotheistic religion

It is not surprising that recognition should be given to Muslims' belief in the one God, and thus to the monotheistic nature of Islam. After all, this belief is a fundamental characteristic of Islam, forming the first part of the profession of faith and constituting the main burden of Islamic theology as is shown by its name, *tawhîd* (establishing or defending the oneness of God). What is significant is the additional note in the text of *Lumen Gentium* according to which Muslims *together with us* adore the one, merciful God. Such a statement could be attacked by both Christians and Muslims.

Some Christians do not wish to admit that Christians and Muslims adore the same God. Our God, they say, is essentially different since we believe in a Trinity of Persons which Muslims reject. The Council, although its documents are replete with Trinitarian references, does not go into this question here. It is content, in both its texts on Islam, to refer to some of the Beautiful Names of God according to the Islamic tradition: the Living, the Subsistent, the Merciful and Almighty, thereby showing that the way Muslims understand God is not unidimensional. The affirmation *together with us* remains; though Christians and Muslims understand God differently, we do not worship different divinities, since God is one. Our religions are monotheistic.

Some Muslims may also object to the statement of *Lumen Gentium*. There are Muslims who attack the Christian claim to monotheism. There is a Qur'anic basis for this attack, since the Qur'an contains a reference to a Trinity consisting of God, Jesus, and Mary (cf. Q 5:116). Christians may well reply that the Qur'an is denying a false Trinity; they will still be considered by some Muslims to be *mushrikûn* (associators), *kâfirûn* (unbelievers). This may be the reason why certain Muslims prefer to keep the term *Allâh*, not translating it into other languages and thus attempting to mark an essential difference in their understanding of God - yet forgetting that Arabic-speaking Christians have no difficulty in giving a Trinitarian connotation to the same term. The text of *Lumen Gentium* could be taken as a discreet appeal to Muslims to respect the unity of belief in the one God, despite the difference of understanding, though this was probably not the intention of the authors of the text.

Whatever may be the case, one often sees references to 'the three monotheistic religions', indicating Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. That these are monotheistic religions is true, and the texts of Vatican II can be seen to bear witness to this fact. Yet to talk about *the three* monotheistic religions would seem to be an exaggeration. There are in fact other monotheistic religions. One has only to think of the Sikhs. If the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are to be brought together in a special way, another category has to be found.

The Council's texts on Islam speak about belief in God as Creator and Judge. This is also something that Christians and Muslims have in common. It is not to be overlooked since it has practical consequences, providing an opening for dialogue on the common origin and common destiny of humankind. It can also lead to a joint evaluation of the role of human beings as vice-regents (*khulafâ'*) or stewards of God's creation, with implications for a more equitable distribution and respectful use of the earth's resources. Such a reflection is not going beyond the conciliar basis, since *Nostra Aetate* exhorts Christians and Muslims to work together to "preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values" (NA 3).

Islam as a revealed religion?

Besides talking about the three monotheistic religions, Muslims often use the term 'celestial' as applied to these same religions. They have a celestial origin because they claim to be based on revelation. Do the texts of the Council encourage Catholic Christians to accept this terminology? In *Nostra Aetate*, after the reference to Muslims' belief in God who is one and the Creator, there is added 'who has also spoken to men'. As Caspar has written: 'This divine name, the God who reveals, is of capital importance for the religious and supernatural value of the Islamic faith. The Muslim does not merely believe in a God of reason, a "God of philosophers" as Pascal put it, but in a living God, "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", a God who has spoken to men, within their history, by men, the prophets, even if Christians and Muslims have a different idea of the identity and role of these prophets'.⁹ In fact no mention is made of prophets in *Nostra Aetate*. Obviously Christians do not recognise Muhammad as prophet in the way Muslims do, that is as the final prophet bringing the definitive revelation, otherwise they would become Muslims. On the other hand Muslims have difficulty in accepting any type of qualified prophetic role that Christians would be ready to attribute to Muhammad. Therefore silence was preferred on this point, to the continuing disappointment, it must be admitted, of many Muslims¹⁰.

The Church's constant teaching is that after Jesus Christ there is no further need of revelation; for as Jesus said, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away' (Mt. 24:35). Accordingly Islam is not considered by the Church to be a revealed religion.

Nevertheless the words used in *Nostra Aetate* are significant since they underline the importance of faith for Muslims. It is a faith which flows into life for, as the declaration says, '(Muslims) strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God'. This is the basic attitude of *islâm*, which is by no means a fatalistic submission to a despotic divinity but the response of an adoring servant (*'abd*) to a transcendent God who remains wrapped in mystery.

Islam as a scriptural religion?

Muslims claim that the Qur'an contains the direct words of God, and their scripture plays a central role in Islamic worship and life. Moreover Islam readily classifies Jews and Christians as 'People of the Book'. Christians, however, may well object to this classification since they consider themselves to be followers of a person, Jesus Christ, and

not of a book. The notions of revelation and the role of the Scriptures are not the same in the two religions.

Nor is there the same relationship between Islam and Christianity as there is between Christianity and Judaism. Paragraph 4 of *Nostra Aetate* states: 'The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets... On this account the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God, in his inexpressible mercy, established the ancient covenant.' Between Jews and Christians there exists therefore, as the same document expresses it, 'a common spiritual heritage'.

The link between the Qur'an and the Christian scriptures, including the Old Testament, is much more tenuous. There are some references in the Qur'an to biblical elements, but the texts of the previous Scriptures are not retained as such - in fact the accusation is levelled that they have been falsified - and they are certainly not used in Islamic worship.¹¹

So although Islam gives a place of primary importance to its own scripture, the Qur'an, it is not recognised by Christians as a biblical religion. That there should be a difference of appreciation on this point is not surprising. Just as Christians cannot expect Jews to accept the New Testament as the authentic interpretation and fulfilment of their scriptures, so Muslims should not expect Christians to accept the Qur'an as the authentic interpretation and definitive version of previous scriptures.

Islam as an Abrahamic religion

Both texts of Vatican II link Islamic faith with Abraham. *Lumen Gentium* says that Muslims 'profess to hold the faith of Abraham'. *Nostra Aetate* states that Muslims submit to God 'just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own'. It must be admitted that these references to Abraham remain somewhat vague. Abraham's faith is recognised, but it is not said how he exemplified this faith. Muslims see Abraham as a champion of monotheism and attribute to him the rebuilding of the Ka'ba, the shrine in Mecca that has become the direction of Muslims' prayer. Christians insist on Abraham's response to God's call to leave his country for a promised land. By both religions Abraham is given as a model of submission to God's mysterious decrees. This spirit of submission was illustrated in a pre-eminent way in his readiness to sacrifice his son, an episode in Abraham's life exalted by Jews, Christians and Muslims, but with a different identification of the victim.

There is silence above all on the question of descent from Abraham. The first version of the text to be introduced into *Lumen Gentium*, following the line advocated by Massignon and his disciples, read: 'The sons of Ishmael, who recognise Abraham as their father and believe in the God of Abraham, are not unconnected with the Revelation made to the patriarchs'. This text also applies to Islam as a revealed religion or a scriptural religion. But in fact the reference to Ishmael was eliminated. Quite apart from the historical question of the descent of the Arabs from Abraham through Ishmael, a question which remains

disputed, the silence on this point is quite consistent with the Christian position with regard to Abraham. Physical descent is unimportant; it is faith that counts. Paul, while referring to Abraham as 'the ancestor from whom we are all descended' (Rom 4:1), declares that 'what fulfils the promise depends on faith, so that it may be a free gift and be available to all of Abraham's descendants, not only those who belong to the Law (i.e.the Jews), but also those who belong to the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all' (Rom 4:16). Elsewhere Paul argues that the promise made to Abraham and to his posterity is actually fulfilled in Christ (cf. Gal 3:16).

There are profound differences in the way Jews, Christians and Muslims see Abraham, yet there is a common recognition of Abraham as a model of faith and submission. As long as there is a readiness to respect the different interpretations, the figure of Abraham provides common ground for the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which can be called with some justification 'abrahamic religions', though this term does not describe them adequately or completely.¹²

This whole examination of what the Second Vatican Council said about Islam can be concluded with the words of R Caspar. 'The Council affirms positively the minimum which is to be accepted. Islam is in the first rank of non-Christian monotheistic religions. If further studies concerning the theology of religions and in particular regarding the theological status of Islam allow one to say more, the Conciliar texts are not opposed'.¹³

Consequences of respect for Islam as a religion

Islam is treated by Vatican II as a religion worthy of respect. This has certain practical consequences, some of which appear in the conciliar texts. There is an explicit recognition of the religious spirit of Muslims. There is mention of certain typical expressions of Islamic religiosity, prayer, alms-deeds and fasting. These are the three central 'pillars' of Islam. The first and fifth pillars, the profession of faith and pilgrimage to Makka, are passed over, presumably because they are too strongly bound up with what is specifically Islamic.

As already mentioned, the Council issued a special declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*, on religious liberty. *Nostra Aetate*, which exhorts Christians and Muslims to work together to preserve and promote liberty, should be read in conjunction with this document. Its principles apply also to Islam. So freedom of worship is upheld, not only for individuals but also in its corporate expression. This implies the possibility for a community to have its own places of worship. There is also the right to teach about one's religion, thus in schools, but also through publications and through the media in general. In all this the civil authorities have the right to exercise a certain control but not to deny the public practice of religion.

One consequence of treating Islam as a separate religion, and not as a Christian heresy, is to be seen in the question of mixed marriages, codified in the new Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, which takes into account the vision of Vatican II. For such marriages a dispensation is required. A distinction is made between the dispensation of 'mixed religion' for baptised persons belonging to different Churches, and that of 'disparity of cult' for people of different religions. In the latter case certain conditions have to be fulfilled

before the dispensation will be granted: there must be sufficient safeguards for the faith of the Christian partner who must also promise to do all in his or her power to have all the children baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church; the other partner must be informed about these promises; 'both parties are to be instructed on the essential ends and properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either party' (c.1125). In Christian-Muslim marriages this last condition needs to be verified carefully, since the Islamic approach to marriage allows polygamy (though in some countries this permission is restricted by statutory legislation) and also repudiation and divorce. These considerations about Islamic marriage may explain why the Council decided not to refer in *Nostra Aetate* to the moral attitude of Muslims not only at the individual level, but also at family and social levels, as had originally been proposed. They preferred to state simply that Muslims 'highly esteem an upright life'.

The recognition of Islam as a separate religion leads finally to an encouragement to dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. This is in fact the whole purpose of the declaration *Nostra Aetate*. When the amended document was presented to the Council it was explained that it was 'not an exhaustive presentation of the religions and their faults and weaknesses but rather (it was) to point out the connection between peoples and religions which (could) serve as a basis for dialogue and collaboration'.¹⁴ The definitive text contains a reference to 'quarrels and dissensions' and there is an appeal to 'forget the past' and make an effort to achieve mutual understanding. To forget does not mean to ignore, but rather not to let oneself be bound by the past. Pope John Paul II has called for a 'purification of memories', a re-examination of the past which includes an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and repentance before God. When faced with questions from the past such as the Crusades and the Islamic conquests, colonialism, the slave trade in which both Christians and Muslims participated, there could be room for a common endeavour to ensure that the burden of history does not poison present relations between Christians and Muslims.

Developments since the Vatican Council

On the reflective level there has been very little change in the position of the Church with regard to Islam. One witness to this is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1992. This official compendium of the teaching of the Church merely repeats *Lumen Gentium* 16, with only a note referring to *Nostra Aetate* 3.¹⁵ In the teaching of the Popes since Vatican II there are perhaps two aspects that have been emphasised which, if not completely new, strike a slightly different tone. The first of these is a reference to common bonds. John Paul II, addressing the Catholic community in Ankara in November 1979, appealed to them 'to recognise and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us'¹⁶ (i.e. Christians and Muslims). Similarly in his discourse to young Muslims in Casablanca, in August 1985, the pope stated: 'The Catholic Church regards with respect and recognises the quality of your religious progress, the richness of your spiritual traditions. I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognise with joy the religious values that we have in common, and give thanks to God for them'.¹⁷ There is nothing grudging here, but rather a call to spiritual emulation.

The second note is that of brotherhood. Already Pope Paul VI, speaking to the Islamic communities of Uganda in 1969, had expressed his hope ‘that what we hold in common may serve to unite Christians and Muslims ever more closely in true brotherhood’.¹⁸ John Paul II, meeting Muslims in Paris in June 1980, greeted them as ‘our brothers in faith in the one God’.¹⁹ He made this even clearer in the Philippines the following year: ‘I deliberately *address you as brothers*: that is certainly what we are, because we are members of the same human family...but we are especially brothers in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs’.²⁰ This may not seem significant until we remember that traditionally the term ‘brother’ was reserved for fellow Christians. The World Council of Churches, in its documents, prefers to speak about ‘neighbours of other faiths’. The use of the term ‘brother’ by the popes can be seen as a sign of openness and friendship.

In evaluating progress since Vatican II we should pay attention not only to the words of the popes but also to their actions. Paul VI went as a pilgrim to the Holy Land in 1964 and greeted Muslim leaders there. Ten years later he instituted, within the Secretariat for non-Christians, a special Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. John Paul II has made a point of meeting with Muslims on many of his journeys, and has included Muslims in all his invitations to come together to pray for peace. In 1989 he took the unprecedented step of writing a letter to Muslims about the situation in the Lebanon; in 1991 after the Gulf War he himself addressed the annual message to Muslims on the occasion of the end of Ramadan. During the Jubilee of the Year 2000, John Paul II performed his own pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where he not only visited places connected with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but went also to the Western Wall and to the Dome of the Rock, and he made a point of meeting with Jewish and Muslim religious leaders. The following year he completed his pilgrimage by following in the footsteps of Moses – taking the opportunity of visiting al-Azhar in Cairo – and in those of St Paul – which provided the occasion for entering the mosque of the Umayyads in Damascus. Recent events have not altered the Pope’s attitude of respect for authentic Islam.

Conclusion

Much more could be said about the practical development of relations between Christians and Muslims in the years since the Second Vatican Council. A complete survey would need to take into account the increase in diplomatic relations established between the Holy See and countries with Muslim majorities. It would have to record the work done by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue both in the field of reflection and in actual encounters with Muslims. It would also take note of the academic agreements which have brought about cooperation between Catholic and Islamic universities. It would list the various publications on Christian-Muslim relations coming from Catholic Churches’ authorities in different parts of the world and the actions they have undertaken to put relations with Muslims on a sound footing. In all of this it can be noted that the texts on Islam officially proclaimed by Vatican II remain not only a constant point of reference but also a source of inspiration.

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¹ J.-M. GAUDEUL, *Encounters and Clashes*, PISAI, Rome, 1990, Vol.II, p.78; cf. Vol.I. pp.106-112.

² *Ibid.* Vol.II, p.19; cf. Vol.I pp.67-68.

³ *Ibid.* Vol.I p.67.

⁴ *Ibid.* Vol.II, p.9; cf. Vol. I pp.28-30.

⁵ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Reasons for the Faith against Muslim Objections*, translated by Joseph Kenny, O.P., in *Islamochristiana* 22(1996) p.33.

⁶ Cf. Joseph Farrugia, *The Church and the Muslims*, Gozo, Media Centre, 1988, p.39.

⁷ Cf. R.CASPAR, Les Versions arabes du Dialogue entre le catholico Timothy I et le Caliphe Al-Mahdi, in *Islamochristiana* 3(1977) pp.107-175; J.M.GAUDEUL, *Encounters and Clashes*, Vol.I, pp.34-37, Vol.II, pp.234-245.

⁸ GAUDEUL, *Encounters and Clashes*, Vol.II, p.242.

⁹ Robert CASPAR, Islam according to Vatican II, p.240.

¹⁰ See for instance Atallah SIDDIQUI, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century*, London, Macmillan, 1997, p.35.

¹¹ On this whole question see GRIC (Muslim-Christian Research Group), *The Challenge of the Scriptures: the Bible and the Qur'an*, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis books, 1989 (original French edition 1987).

¹² On Abraham see P.I.S.A.I. Forum - January 26th 1996: Abraham-Ibrahim in the Monotheistic Traditions, in *ENCOUNTER: Documents for Christian-Muslim Understanding*, 1996, n°222-223.

¹³ R.CASPAR, La religion musulmane, in *Vatican II Les relations de l'Eglise avec les religions non chrétiennes*, p.215.

¹⁴ Joseph FARRUGIA, *The Church and the Muslims*, p.74.

¹⁵ For a more detailed study see Michael L.FITZGERALD, Other Religions in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in *Islamochristiana* 19 (1993), pp.29-41; also Mohammed ARKOUN, Réflexions d'un Musulman sur le "Nouveau Catéchisme", *ibid.* pp.43-54.

¹⁶ Cf. Francesco GIOIA (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-2005)*, Boston, Pauline Books & Media, 2006, n°339.

¹⁷ Cf. GIOIA, n°474.

¹⁸ Cf. GIOIA, n°263.

¹⁹ Cf. GIOIA, n°360.

²⁰ Cf. GIOIA, n°363, emphasis in the original.