



The Renewal and Reform of the Catholic Church's Relationship with the Religious Others: Prospects and Challenges for a Theological Humanistic Turn in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

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Abstract

This article aims at exploring some recent developments in Catholic Church's recent relationship with religious others. It does so by exploring the theological-anthropological sources behind Vatican II and some subsequent Papal teachings concerning the Church's mission of dialogue. Specifically, it discusses the notion of common origin, destiny and common humanity as sources for praxis-oriented and faith-based initiatives in a Christian-Muslim dialogue. This article is divided into three sub-sections. First, it considers the Catholic Church's renewed dialogue with non-Christian believers, with particular focus on the theological-anthropological turn in recent Church teaching. Second, it examines the prospects and challenges of Christian-Muslim dialogue based on belief in God the creator and divine revelation, and human beings' response to divine manifestations in history. Finally, it considers some faith-based humanistic and dialogic initiatives that emerge from the Christian-Muslim confession of one creator God. The paper suggests that a theology of dialogue that understands the world and human beings as the realm of encounter, uncovering and necessitating the divine and the Church's (salvific) activity in human history, can foster faith-based humanistic and dialogic initiatives between Christians and Muslims.

Keywords

Vatican II, theological-anthropology, Christian-Muslim dialogue, creation, common origin and destiny, common humanity

Introduction

Vatican II and papal teachings, especially those of John Paul II, favour a dialogue with Islam based on the common belief in the one creator God, and the common origin and destiny of all people. This theological anthropological turn, however, is rooted in the Church's renewed understanding of the implication of the human person and history as important *loci* for theology. The question, however, is whether the theological and humanistic perspectives offer rich prospects for dialogue with religious others. In particular, can their common belief in God as the creator of all and the recognition of their common humanity help Christians and Muslims to collaborate in the service of humanity, especially of solidarity, justice and peace? In order to deal adequately with the subject, the paper will proceed in three sections. First, it will explain some aspects of reform and renewal in contemporary Christian theology of religions and dialogue. Second, it will discuss the prospects and challenges facing a Christian-Muslim dialogue based on the common belief in God as the creator, the recognition of a common origin, destiny and a common humanity of all human beings. Thirdly, it will sift out some praxis-oriented means for Christian-Muslim dialogue in the present context of religious diversity.

A theological-anthropological turn in the Christian theology of religions and inter-religious dialogue

Renewal and reform is a significant aspect of the Church's life, not just something for the sixteenth-century. Recent developments along the line of the Church's understanding of, and relation with religious others point to the fact that, more than the idea of a discontinuity, the Church reaches out to its religious neighbours based on its retrieval of the Church's inner life. Some have argued that Vatican II's theology of religions and dialogue is motivated by a theology based on the "personalism of God's own self-communication to human beings."¹ The fact is that, as the theology emerging from the Council shows, on the eve of Vatican II, the imperative of the human person and human history in the understanding and interpretation of the Church's beliefs was very significant. On the one hand, Vatican II took place between 1962 and 1965 following a period in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with a turbulent history. The socio-political and economic situations, including Communism, Marxism, Nazism

¹ Michael Barnes, "Opening up a Dialogue: *Dei Verbum* and the Religions," in *Modern Theology* 29 (2013) p.12.

and the two World Wars paved the way for decolonization and the decentralization of institutionalism and power. It was a world in need of servants, service rather than authority, dialogue rather than exclusion. In this regard, Pope John XXIII's Encyclical letter *Pacem in terris* (1963) highlighted the Church's role in promoting human rights, after the crimes perpetrated by totalitarian regimes during and after the war. Theology and its content came to be subjected to the crucible of human existential contexts. Terms such as salvation and revelation must therefore, apply to historic human experiences and circumstances.²

The challenges of globalization warranted the coming together of people of different traditions which demands the flourishing of friendship, openness, respect and acceptance. The Church had to take cognizance of its religious neighbours. Against the idea held by Christians that these religions would soon die off, the reality of their vitality and the impact on their members in the religious sphere was evident. Islam, in this case, emerges as a vital religion and civilization for its adherents. The place of religious plurality in the one single divine plan of salvation became paramount for Catholicism, so it is not a surprise that the pluralist theology of religions seeks to cash out Christianity's claim to uniqueness and particularity for the sake of accommodating religious plurality and establishing dialogue among adherents of other religions. As Jacques Dupuis remarks, the perspective of the theology of religions will no longer be restricted to asking whether they are within the salvific plan of God as in the medieval theology. The question would, as a result of the deepened and increased knowledge of other religions by theologians, be extended to "how the religious traditions to which those people belonged stood in relation to the Gospel message and Christianity."³ In other words, what could a Christian theological discourse affirm concerning those religions?

The eve of Vatican II was the dawn of a renewed attention to the human person and human experience. For Christian theology, it was the dawn of a renewed and better understanding of the Church's inner life rooted in the theology of divine self-revelation. The theology of revelation was challenged by the theology of dialogue, which understands the world and human beings as the realm of encounter, uncovering and necessitating divine and the Church's (salvific) activity in human history. We recall the influence of the *nouvelle théologie* on the Council's understanding of the human person and human

² Peter Hünemann, "Continuity and Discontinuity in an Epochal Transition of Faith: The Hermeneutics of Vatican II," in *The Legacy of Vatican II*, ed. Massimo Faggioli and Andrea Vicini (NY: Paulist, 2015), pp.36-62.

³ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (NY: Orbis, 1997), pp.130-31.

history and its impact on the theology that emerged at the Council. On this note, Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx, including other currents that represent the *nouvelle théologie* movement interceded for a renewal of language and a more integration of the human and salvation history.⁴ Specifically, Rahner's theological approach based on the "personalism of God's own self-communication to human beings"⁵ had great impact on Vatican II's theology of religions and dialogue. In this sense, Barnes argues we can read in Vatican II how the vision of "the single life-giving mystery of God's love in which Christians and others participate" forms the theological background for its debate about the other religions.⁶

It is also interesting to understand the manner of the Christian approach in this new theological understanding of religious plurality. First, Vatican II has a theological concern about how to speak of Jesus Christ as exemplar of a "humanized" and "divinized" human being whose love presents what the project of the Christian life is all about.⁷ Second, the Council had a renewed understanding of the contingency of our theological formulations following the divine mystery and the eschatological perspective of our belief in a God who reveals. The theology of history led to a renewal of the Church's doctrinal formulations about the values of religious others. On this note, Vatican II came very close to Karl Rahner's inclusivism but with two major differences: one is that the Council avoided Karl Rahner's thesis of anonymous Christians; the other is that the Council did not affirm his theology of the presence of supernatural salvific grace in non-Christian traditions.⁸ On these topics, the Council kept the debate open. Yet, the Council established many possibilities for an

⁴ Karim Schelkens, *Catholic Theology of Revelation on the Eve of Vatican II: A Redaction History of the Schema De Fontibus Revelationis (1960-1962)*, ed. Wim Janse, BRILL (Boston, 2010), p.144.

⁵ Michael Barnes, "Opening up a Dialogue: *Dei Verbum* and the Religions," *Modern Theology* 29 (2013): p.12. Prior to the Council, Karl Rahner ruminated on the consequences of sharing one's neighborhood with others in the human global world. He proposed a coextensive nature of human history and the history of salvation as one of the theological means by which Catholicism can understand the universality of divine revelation in human history. Thus, the divine presence is everywhere, even in an inchoate manner, in non-Christian cultures and religions. His intent was to hold together "the necessity of Christian faith and the universal salvific will of God's love and omnipotence" in the understanding of the human person and the divine self-communication of God through grace and the incarnation. See, Karl Rahner, "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," in *Theological Investigations*, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Darton, 1984), p.294. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury, 1978), See, especially, chapters three and four.

⁶ Barnes, "Opening up a Dialogue," p.13.

⁷ Walter Kasper, "The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (1996), p.138.

⁸ Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), pp.75-77.

advancement in understanding and openness towards religious others in their human context.

The documents of the Council, especially the Declaration on the Church's Relations with non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (NA), promulgated on 28 October 1965, and the Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), promulgated on 7 December 1965, are significant for understanding the theological-anthropological underpinning of the conciliar teachings about non-Christian believers. In these documents, the Church's theology of dialogue emerges in an anthropological and humanistic perspective. They point to a unique renewal and reform that has occurred in the Church's interfaith dialogue and its manner of existence in the world, especially since Vatican II. In these documents, the Church realizes its vocation as a sacrament of salvation through dialogue and collaboration for the realization of the well-being of humankind.

NA features Vatican II's theology of dialogue. Precisely, the first part of the declaration offers an understanding of the major common ground among human beings, that is to say, what human beings have in common and what leads them to mutual fellowship (§1). The significant point is that human beings have a common origin and destiny and that the divine offer of salvation and providence extends to all. Furthermore, the document speaks of the common ground among religions on the basis of the fact that human beings have a perception of a great power, which they regard as the divine, and which penetrates their lives with a deep religious sense (§2). Going further, the document points out that collaboration against injustice and for peace and liberation are offshoots of the Church's mission for the realization of the common origin and destiny of all people. Among others, it affirms that "the Church also looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit whole-heartedly . . ." (§3).

The dialogue, rooted in faith in God and a common humanity, resonates in papal teachings, especially that of Paul VI and John Paul II. We recall that the second half of Paul VI's 1964 encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (ES) is almost entirely focused on the theme of a *dialogue of salvation*, which God initiates with humankind. The teaching of Pope Paul on the dialogue of salvation affirms that at the very heart of revelation and salvation lies the question of dialogue (§72). Furthermore, a dialogue of salvation takes the form of the incarnation, namely, God's meeting with people in their own existential human situation. Salvation is a gift from God and originates in the mind of God. Having received this gift, the Church has reasons for a creative plunging forth into the mission of salvation through dialogue. Hence, Paul VI declares in ES that: "We share with the

whole of the human race a common nature, a common life, with all its gifts and all its problems" (§97). Following Paul VI's view, the dialogue of salvation assumes a quest for both spiritual and temporal well-being of the human person through promoting religious liberty, good culture, good fellowship, social welfare and civil order. The dialogue of salvation takes the authentic development of the human person as central to the Church's understanding and interpretation of God's self-communication.

In his teaching, John Paul II brings to the fore a Christian humanistic approach to dialogue. In his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (*RH*) of March 4, 1979, Pope John Paul II echoes the imperative of the Church's dialogue with non-Christian believers. According to him, Vatican II bequeaths the Church a self-awareness that is rooted in dialogue and consciousness of the "terrestrial globe" (*RH*§11). John Paul II never allowed the aspect of difference to blur the unity of humankind. Throughout his pontificate, he made a number of significant pronouncements on shared beliefs between Christianity and Islam and he finds shared faith to be a basic foundation for dialogue. Furthermore, he fostered friendly relations between Christians and Muslims in significant ways such as his writings, speeches and gestures, (especially in the sharing of prayers, visits, and meetings).⁹ In all these gestures John Paul II highlighted the Christian and Muslim belief in the one God and the common origin and destiny of humankind.¹⁰ According to John Paul II, a common humanity provides the basic foundation for dialogue that cuts across divisions. Explicitly, he speaks of the affinity of all human beings as one issuing from their creation: "This radical unity, which belongs to the very identity of the human being, is based on the mystery of the divine creation . . ." ¹¹ So despite differences in the manner of affirmation, the pope affirms the shared theistic belief of Christians and Muslims. These themes supply the foundations for collaboration among people of different faiths.

The Catholic Church's renewal has certainly affirmed the single divine mystery present in human history that has borne fruit in the idea of God as creator and our sharing a common humanity with a common origin and destiny. For Christians, "there is only one unique principle and goal, the fullness of life in God for every human

⁹ Peter Phan, "John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue: Reality and Promise," in *The Vision of John Paul II: Assessing his Thought and Influence*, ed. Gerald Mannion (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), p.241.

¹⁰ This fact is vivid in the theology of John Paul, especially in his Addresses to Muslims in Joannes Paulus II, *Chiesa e Islam*; Gerard Mannion, *The Vision of John Paul II: Assessing his Thought and Influence* (Collegeville:MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).

¹¹ John Paul II, "Address to the Roman Curia in Rome (December 22, 1986)," in *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, ed. Francesco Gioia (Rome: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1994), p.361.

person.”¹² Having the same creator, the human race has its origin and destiny in God. This means that every person has one origin and share affinity with each other. The corollary is that people are considered to be brothers and sisters with each other. The Conciliar document *GS* states, “Since God our Father is the origin and destiny of all things, we are all called to be sisters and brothers. Therefore, in our common human and divine vocation we can and should work together without violence and deceit, and in true peace, to build the world” (§92). The theological-anthropological perspective, rooted in understanding of God’s presence in the world and human beings’ response to God through acts of faith are thus to be further harnessed for the purpose interreligious dialogue.

Prospects and challenges for creation and the common humanity of all as sources for Christian-Muslim Dialogue

How does a common origin and destiny, and a common humanity present an important perspective for Christian-Muslim relations? How do Christians and Muslims respond to the idea of God as creator? What is their response to the humanistic implications of the social nature of human beings and their sharing of a common humanity? Are there some ethical implications that accrue from this common origin and destiny in the one God? In what follows, we shall examine the prospects and challenges for realizing such dialogue by focusing on Islam.

Challenges

Scholars are divided on the question of whether Islam supports a theological-anthropological interpretation of the belief in the one creator God and the creaturehood of human beings. Joel Kraemer and Louis Gardet question the existence of humanism in Islam. In particular, Gardet resists the idea of Islamic humanism on the grounds that in Islam it is the believer who is valued but not the human being as such.¹³ Thus, for him, it may seem, on face of it, that Islamic theology is not primarily concerned with the human condition. He claims that the question of sin is not evident in the Quranic understanding of salvation. The absence of the question of the human person calls to mind Kraemer’s observation that “There is hardly

¹² Risto Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Christian-Muslim Encounters: Theological Foundations of the Work of the French Roman Catholic Church’s Secretariat for Relations with Islam*. (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2001), p.81.

¹³ Louis Gardet, *La Cité Musulmane: Vie Sociale et Politique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1969), pp.273-322.

any surmise, either in the Quran or in its standard theologies, about the stirring problems of God and man [sic] that are involved in the terms sin and salvation. The whole drama of salvation between God and the world, so vivid in Biblical realism, from which Islam, historically speaking, is an offshoot, is entirely absent.”¹⁴ The fact is that, for Islam, the human being is primarily a believer and must be understood as such.

Contrary to the view that refutes the idea of Islamic humanism, Lenn Goodman develops a case for Islamic humanism by mentioning the secular life, namely, culture, love, poetry, fashion, etc., and the spiritual life as legitimate facets of human experience in Islam.¹⁵ In his study, the relationship between the secular and spiritual is complex. Often, the secular is rejected as a distraction from the spiritual, yet the secular is at the service of the otherworldly and the hereafter. Thus, there is a complex relationship in the understanding of the life of human beings in relation to their religious life.¹⁶ One argument for Islamic humanism, according to Goodman, is what thrived in medieval Islam in form of virtue ethics. With Ahmad Muhummad Miskawayh (d. 1032) for example, Goodman points out that “manners and mores of a universal human culture crucial to our fulfilment as individuals and as a species” are present as philosophical humanism in the case of Miskawayh.¹⁷ Thus virtue ethics counteracts the strict legalism and otherworldly perspective of Islam. Nevertheless, a tensile and complex relationship between the human condition and Islamic legalism was explicit in Goodman’s effort to portray aspects of humanistic hermeneutics in the interpretation of revelation in Islam.

Despite the efforts of Goodman, many scholars think otherwise. In fact, the bulk of arguments would respond in the negative to the suggestion that Islam has concerns for the human person and their well-being as aspects of their faith-understanding, especially with regard to salvation in present existence. Herbert Berg, for example, asserts that “if one is looking for a humanism that recognizes the value and dignity of humanity *and* makes humanity the measure of all things, one is unlikely to find humanism as ubiquitous in Islam as Goodman does.”¹⁸ In the divine-human drama, the human being is God’s vice-regent. The Jannah and Jahannam (eternal life and

¹⁴ Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1938), p.218.

¹⁵ Lenn Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), see ch.1.

¹⁶ Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p.65. Paraphrased in: Herbert Berg, “Islamic Humanism,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): p.280.

¹⁷ Berg, “Islamic Humanism,” p.109.

¹⁸ Berg, “Islamic Humanism,” p.281.

eternal fire) have control of human life in the present in the terms of eternal reward and punishment.¹⁹ The otherworldly is most directly and immediately connected with human life in the present, controlling the choices people make. The hereafter is the central principle of moral conduct in the Muslim community. Thus, a construction of the religious idea of salvation that pays attention to issues of present existence must look at how the Muslim notion of the hereafter is played out in the present. For instance, one could ask: What does the Quran say about peace, love, kindness, tolerance, war, violence and how are these at play for the Muslim idea of the hereafter?

Prospects

Belief in God the creator of all, the attributes of God displaying divine immanence in relation to human beings and creation, and the ethics of hospitality are sources for a human-oriented Christian-Muslim dialogue. Muslims affirm that there is one God, who is Creator and sustainer of the universe and humankind, the origin and end of all things (Q96:1,2). The Quran emphasizes that God the Creator is in control of all events, both natural and historical.²⁰ On this basis some have argued that it is possible to speak of a Quranic anthropology.²¹

Jukko suggests that “the idea of God as the creator suits especially well the Christian dialogue with Islam, because Islamic theology has not been as much subject to challenges from secularism, natural philosophy or natural science as has been the case with Christian theology.”²² Creation should be prominent in a theology that engages Muslims in dialogue especially with regard to reason and humanistic interpretation of their notion of revelation. This is so because, “even though Muslims do not subscribe to human agency in their interpretations of the revelation in the Quran, they accept that nature serves an important aspect of revelation in that there is wisdom and guidance in nature, and nature affirms the divine attributes.”²³

Creation provides a possible ground for the appreciation of diversity in Islam. The Quran teaches that diversity in creation is the design of God; “and to His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors” (30:22). References to the acceptance of diversity in Islam point to the wisdom in appreciating God’s creation and command the respect

¹⁹ Berg, “Islamic Humanism,” p.89.

²⁰ Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Christian-Muslim Encounters*, p.80.

²¹ Louis Gardet, *Les Hommes de L’islam: Approches des Mentalités* (Bruxelles: 1977). As cited in Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Christian-Muslim Encounters*, p.80.

²² Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Christian-Muslim Encounters*, p.81.

²³ Montgomery, *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World*, p.92.

of differences in the human community. Another text that refers to the Quran's injunction to freedom of religion and affirms that plurality has a place in the Islamic concept of God is: "had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as you are). So, vie with one with another in good works. Unto God you will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ" (5:48). In line with recognition of otherness, we think of the Muslim culture of hospitality which is a concrete way of recognition and relationship with the other.

According to Mona Siddiqui, in Islam we can see divine hospitality and humanism based on God the creator and the divine attributes. Islamic theology reconciles the transcendence of God with his immanence through the attributes of God. We reflect on hospitality through the idea of "God's hospitality" and what it means for our life and relationships in this world. According to Siddiqui, the notion of divine hospitality underpins Islam's view of hospitality as a meeting-point between the sacred and the ordinary. For her, the notion of a hospitable God is not common in Islam but, nevertheless, there is evidence of God's care and mercy sustaining people and prompting goodness through hospitality.²⁴ The dominant sense of divine hospitality is the notion of provision and nourishment, where God provides for his creation (Q 35,3; 11,6).

Embedded in the vocabulary of charity, generosity, mercy and compassion in the Quran, doing something for one another, e.g., hospitality, means doing something for God. However, keeping in mind the question of the difficult issue of anthropomorphism, divine hospitality must be nuanced. The best approach would be through the divine attributes recognised as a manner of God's immanence in creation. According to Siddiqui, the vocabulary of mercy, compassion and benevolent replete in the Quran derive from the attributes of God. Hence, she develops the argument that hospitality, which incorporates these fundamental divine attributes, is inspired by the idea that doing for others is living according to the divine qualities. Furthermore, she notes that doing for the other implies doing for God, since "we are always in God's presence, and when we think and act generously towards someone else, we are being the way God wants us to be, because this is how God himself relates to us."²⁵ For her, the virtues of generosity and compassion take us closer to God and prefigure the hospitality that characterizes the divine-human relationship.

Supporting this, Chris Hewer, the Christian Islamologist, argues that, according to the meaning of Islam as total submission to the

²⁴ Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam: Welcoming in God's Name* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), p.124.

²⁵ Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam*, p.126.

divine will, the divine attributes are indications to what kind of qualities human beings ought to possess.²⁶ According to him, we can retrieve the idea that a relationship of cordiality should necessarily exist from the context of God the creator and the creaturehood of human beings in Islam. Such a relationship connects the entire creation?²⁷ Natural theology thus acknowledges certain theological and philosophical paradigms such as the natural law, which affirms God-given wisdom and reason in human acts. The esteem, recognition and respect for others can issue from ethics, precisely from natural law. Such an ethics is based on and connected with creation. In both Christianity and Islam, human beings are created with the capacity to reason, to recognize the attributes of God in creation and to recognize what is good and proper. Furthermore the guidance and instruction revealed in both scriptures contain elements of the recognition of creation and human beings. It is this concept of revelation and natural law that opens up the domain of ethics to recognition and respect for otherness and to other values for human society.

Does the perspective of creation, creaturehood and creator provide a humanistic groundings for hospitality that would be acceptable in Christian-Muslim relations? Of course, such a position would be novel in Christian-Muslim dialogue because Siddiqui's idea that doing something for one another implies doing something for God has been borrowed from Christianity and points to a humanism that some Muslims are averse to. Thus, "divine hospitality" might be a possible avenue for the establishment of a humanistic and relational interpretation of God's revelation for the guidance of human beings in their interpersonal, spiritual and temporal existence. Such an approach fosters a bridging of the strictly otherworldly understanding of obedience in the Quran and the practice of human existence. Nevertheless, it must take into consideration some difficulties such as doctrinal differences. These occur on both sides. Christians have been reluctant to address the issues of revelation and prophethood in Islam and these have remained a no-go area in Christian-Muslim relations. Muslims cast suspicion on Christian monotheism, which often challenges the acceptance of a common theistic belief. More than doctrinal differences, fraternity is deeply enshrined in Islam where the community of the *Umma* lends concrete instances of a common humanity based on common worship of God. Extending the sources of community based on Muslim brotherhood to our common creation, common humanity and praise of diversity will be the greatest challenge for the Muslim community.

²⁶ *Understanding Islam with Dr Chris Hewer*, (Ahlulbayt TV, May 9, 2013).

²⁷ *Understanding Islam with Dr Chris Hewer*,

Suggestions for Christian-Muslim dialogue

The pertinent question worth raising here is: what should Christian-Muslim recognition and respect for others try to achieve for creation and humanity? For us, building bridges and peace-building are two most important issues in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Building of bridges is important because mutual suspicion is at the root of most Christian-Muslim conflicts. Mutual suspicion happens both on the level of doctrine and socio-political aspects. On its own, peace-building is important because there is a strong affinity between peace and development. The constant inter-religious rivalry, conflicts, discrimination and hatred has led some countries such as Nigeria to near death at every level of development. The lack of knowledge of the other is undoubtedly one of the roots of religious conflict.

Confronted with such a scenario, an authentic Christian-Muslim dialogue built on a shared origin and destiny would be helpful. Precisely, a dialogue that is based on the idea of divine hospitality takes human beings beyond their own capacity to the capacity of God. It is rooted in the idea of God as creator, of divine creative and salvific intent explicit in the revelation of his saving guidance and will. For Christians, it is evident in the revelation of a personal God in Jesus Christ. For Muslims, it is rooted in God's revelation of his will that calls us to upright living. The model of God's loving and benevolent presence in creation is the source of our common humanity, rather than our own acceptance of it.

In the face of recent world history of violence, poverty and victimization, people crave for collaboration for the promotion of common human existence and working for development and liberation. Christians and Muslims believers in the one God must find reasons to collaborate for liberation and development. There is a need to promote human values, to cooperate, to develop and liberate humanity, to work jointly for justice and peace. Not to confront but to encourage each other to live in the most authentic way, administering nature and the earth, which do not belong to human beings but to God. For Christians, working together for the common good makes evident how Christ himself joined with each human being in his/her own way of humanity.

Furthermore, God's call is not elsewhere than in the concrete (created) world. Real dialogue thus takes place in the sphere of human existence. As Jukko says, "in dialogue, common human tasks are worked at when partners cooperate to develop and liberate humanity and to build up a better world."²⁸ If Christians and Muslims recognize the one Creator God who is benevolent, merciful and

²⁸ Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Christian-Muslim Encounters*, p.85.

compassionate, our religious commitment must move us to mercy and pity towards the misery of people in need, the victims of violence, the marginalized and oppressed. The poor and victims of injustice invite our benevolence and compassion and challenge us to move from indifference to active engagement in the betterment of our world.

Conclusion

The paper discusses dialogic initiatives rooted in Christian-Muslim religious belief in one creator God, the divine attributes manifest in creation, and our sharing of a common humanity. Beyond polemics, recent Catholic Church theory and praxis of interreligious dialogue with Islam point to dialogue rooted in our common origin and common humanity as sources for collaboration for the development of the human context. The belief in God and recognition of creation and creaturehood in the teachings of Islam exposes some prospects and challenges for Christian-Muslim dialogue. While recognizing the challenges involved, it is obvious that Christians and Muslims have credible dialogic sources in their notion of the attributes of God displaying divine immanence in relation to human beings and creation, and in the ethics of hospitality.

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