

## THE QUR'ĀN IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CONVERSATIONS: NEGOTIATING THROUGH DIFFICULTIES

**Dr. Jean DRUEL, OP**

in conversation with

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### **Introduction**

Before we present the interview, it will be helpful to lay the context for the question regarding the value of Christians exploring the holy book of Muslims, the Holy Qur'ān. This interviewer is often asked by Christian students: Can Christians read and understand the Qur'ān? How should a Christian assess the Holy Qur'ān? Can the reading of the Qur'ān nourish the spiritual life of Christians; and by Muslim students: What do you say about the Qur'ān? Though they look simple, these questions lead a student-scholar into a chequered history of Christian-Muslim Relations. Moreover, they cannot be considered in isolation but with the companion questions from the Muslim approach to the Holy Bible. In the context of such questions, we recognise that the Scriptures play an important role in shaping the faith of the people who adhere to a certain faith tradition. In interfaith dialogue, it is important to understand the Scriptures of the others for a fruitful conversation.

This process is not easy. D. Marshall gives a warning when he writes on the Bible vis-à-vis the Qur'ān:

At the heart of the Qur'ān there is a vision of religious history which includes an ideal form of Christianity. This consists of a Jesus and a Mary who are precursors of Muhammad; a Scripture which is a precursor of the Qur'ān; and Christians who are precursors of the

followers of Muhammad. Initially, this ideal understanding of Christianity is not greatly challenged, but gradually the ideal collides with the actual. The ideal of a Christianity which must find its proper goal in Muhammad and the Qur'ān runs up against the actual forms of Christianity adhered to by the Christians encountered by Muhammad. Their failure to acknowledge Muhammad and the Qur'ān reveals that such Christians are distortions of what followers of Jesus should be; that they hold a distorted understanding of Jesus ...; and that they have distorted the scripture brought by Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

It may not be out of place to explicate the Muslim position on the Qur'ān in relation to the Bible. Muslim scholars stress that Islam is a revealed religion and that previous revelations point to the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. They argue that all the Books that were revealed by God, including the Bible and the Qur'ān, contain essentially the same message. Muhammad came with the final message for humanity. The Qur'ān confirms what had been said in the earlier revelations and corrects what has been misunderstood, misinterpreted, corrupted, changed and concealed. As a result, whatever conforms to the Qur'ān is authentic and whatever does not, is unauthentic.

Two different trends appear in the arguments of these scholars. First, several scholars argue that the earlier revelations had specific references to the coming of Muhammad. However, those references had been removed. They argue that this was a clear indication of corruption and human tampering with the Christian scriptures. They support their argument on the basis of Qur'ānic teachings.

Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), for instance, argue that the actual text of the Jewish and Christian scriptures is corrupted. He denies any truth value to the Bible. His reasoning is that since Christians were persecuted in the early centuries, they could not have guaranteed faultless transmission. He concludes that since the Bible attributes immoral activities to the prophets, it cannot be a revealed text.

Another approach *vis-à-vis* the Bible claims that if the Bible is interpreted rightly, it could be a source of truth. This trend claims

<sup>1</sup>D. Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'ān," in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2013), 24-25.

that Jews and Christians have interpreted their scriptures wrongly. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) is an example of this trend. He divides the Bible into different categories and says that each category has to be approached differently. His contention is that the Bible is a garland of different genres. Each genre should be interpreted in a particular way. A Muslim who knows the Qur'ān and its message will be able to help Christians to understand the Bible better. In short, the Bible needs a Muslim interpretation. His approach is like that of Christians to Jewish scriptures. Christians interpret Jewish scriptures in the light of the Gospel. Similarly, al-Ghazālī seems to invite Christians to interpret the gospels in the light of the Qur'ān. Both these trends undermine in different ways the Jewish and Christian understanding of the Scriptures.

Some Muslim scholars like Ibn Sina (d. 1037), Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) and Sir Sayyid (d. 1898) accepted the text of the Bible as it stood. They located the corruption in the interpretation, not in the text. Some Muslim scholars like Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad (d. 1964), Fathi Uthman (b. 1928), and Khalid Muhammad Khalid (b. 1920) recognise that the Gospels are based on the knowledge of historical events and that their interpretations need not exclude the Muslim ones.<sup>2</sup>

Christian W. Troll, a leading exponent in the field of Christian-Muslim relations lays down an important rule for a profitable interaction between Christians and Muslims while reading together the Bible and the Qur'ān.<sup>3</sup> He writes that Christians and Muslims

<sup>2</sup>See: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, II, 412-413; C. W. Troll, *Muslims Ask, Christians Answer* (Lahore: Multimedia Affairs: 2012), 18.

<sup>3</sup>C. W. Troll, "Bible and Qur'ān in Dialogue," *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 79/80, <http://www.sankt-georgen.de/leseraum/troll37.pdf>, accessed December 10, 2019. There are a number of studies on some of the exemplary approaches to the study of the Qur'ān and the Bible in a comparative way. For instance, see James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 28-65; M. R. Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān," *The Muslim World* 75 (1985): 1-16; N. Calder, "From Midrash to Scripture: The Sacrifice of Abraham in Early Islamic Tradition," *Le Muséon: Revue des études orientales* 101 (1988): 375-402; and R. Firestone, "Comparative Studies in Bible and Qur'ān: A Fresh Look at Genesis 22 in Light of Sura 37," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction*:

should “grasp the basic point that in the two faiths the Word of God addressed by God to the human race is understood in significantly different ways.”<sup>4</sup> Christians and Muslims should not fail to grasp the profound differences in their convictions about the nature and message of their scriptures, otherwise conversations between them will not take off above irrelevant criticism and confusion.<sup>5</sup> The revelation of the Qur’ān as the Word of God is understood by Muslims as “the final, unique and fully authentic manifestation of the Word of God, addressed to humankind through the ministry of Muhammad,”<sup>6</sup> while for Christians, the story of revelation comes to its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, who Christians believe is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). In addition, Christians believe that public revelation ends with the death of the last Apostle.<sup>7</sup>

For meaningful interreligious conversations between Muslims and Christians, Muslims should recognise that Christians believe that the Word did not become a book, but, rather, the Word became

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*Essays in Honour of William M. Brinner*, edited by B. H. Hary, et al (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 169-184.

<sup>4</sup>C. W. Troll, *Dialogue and Difference* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 132.

<sup>5</sup>M. Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 104-105.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>It is important to note that within Catholic theology there are two different ways in which revelation is understood. Most Catholic theologians before K. Rahner recognized revelation as truths revealed by God. These revealed truths were gathered in a deposit of faith. These revealed truths, it was believed, should be acknowledged as true on the authority of God as mediated by the Church for one’s salvation. This is a static understanding of revelation. The revelations possessed by non-Christian religions were considered to be a preparation for the Christian gospel. In this scheme of things, there would be no place for the Qur’ānic revelation, as it came after Jesus Christ. In contrast to this school, K. Rahner argued that revelation is not static but dynamic. It is God’s self-communication to which human persons respond. Since revelation occurs within historical situations, there could be Jewish, Islamic or Indic revelations. See: K. Rahner, “Revelation,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, edited by K. Rahner, C. Ernest, Kevin Smyth, vol. 5 (London: Burns & Oates), 358 and R. P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 252. See also: Rene Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1987); G Moran, *Theology of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966); A. Shorter, *Revelation and Its Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983); A. Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).

incarnate in the person of Jesus, while Christians should recognize that Muslims believe that God's word is preserved in a book, the Holy Qur'ān.<sup>8</sup>

Muslims might ask: What about the Bible? Is it the Word of God? Muslims have the right to know about Christian thinking on this subject. Christians use the term 'Word of God' in a way different from that in which Muslims use it in reference to the Qur'ān. For Christians, the Word speaks in and through the words of men and women, the authors who composed the various books in the Bible.<sup>9</sup> The limitations of the writers' cultures, languages and customs are part and parcel of the Bible.

Also, Christians should recognise the spiritual significance of the Qur'ān, which shapes the lives and spiritualities of more than a billion Muslims today. To enter the world of Muslims, Christians need to understand the status and agency of the Qur'ān and the way in which it is respected by Muslims.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Muslims should recognise the place of the Bible in the lives of Christians. This mutual recognition is necessary for any meaningful interaction between them at the level of theology.

<sup>8</sup>See, especially, Chapter 2, "The Qur'ān as Sign of God," in G. Dardess, *Do We Worship the Same God? Comparing the Bible and the Qur'ān* (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006), 27-39.

<sup>9</sup>C. Chapman writes: "While Christians see all the books of the Bible as inspired Scripture, they do not believe that the process of inspiration was such that every single word was dictated to the writers. They believe that these writers were thinking about what they wrote, each with their own style of writing, but that the Holy Spirit of God was at work in their minds." Reflecting on 2 Timothy 3. 15-16 and 2 Peter 1.21, he continues, "Christians therefore think of Scripture as *both* the Word of God *and* word and words of human beings at the same time. They believe that the minds of the writers were fully active as they received the message that God communicated to them. God was at work in their minds as they wrote. The Word of God has come to us *in* and *through* the words of the human writer. Although the human element in the process of revelation means that people wrote within their normal limitations, it does not mean that what they wrote is not true and reliable." See: C. Chapman. *The Bible through Muslim Eyes and a Christian Response*, Grove Biblical Series (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2008), 5.

<sup>10</sup>Medieval Christian scholars considered the Qur'ān as a human document compiled by Muhammad. See: N. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960: reprint, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 55-59.

This interviewer met **Dr. Jean Druel, OP** in Beirut at the *Jesuits among Muslims* meeting (July 2019), where he was the resource person. Druel is an expert in Arabic language and a specialist in Christian-Muslim relations. I approached him for a focused conversation on the place of Qur'ān in Christian-Muslim relations. The few conversations held during the free times, later led to this e-interview.

As an initial remark, Druel made an interesting observation: He believes that focusing on what we have in common does more harm than good in Islamic-Christian dialogue because it negates what makes Islam (or Christianity) what it is. But on the other hand, focusing on what opposes us can precipitate useless tensions and misunderstanding. This is remarkable since, generally, experts in inter-faith dialogue invite people to focus on the 'common ground'. Druel, made it clear that after having lived more than twenty years in an Islamic country, he prefers to explore the differences than the similarities. He said: "I know that each inch of the terrain is filled with landmines. With caution and love, however, the journey in this minefield can be extremely rewarding, and this is what I would ultimately like to testify to in my answers."

Presented here are excerpts of our conversation.

**Edwin:** *Is devotional recitation of the Qur'ān an appropriate Christian practice? If so, how is this practice best understood and justified?*

**Druel:** First it must be said, to a Christian, the text of the Qur'ān is not comparable to the Bhagavad-Gita or the Aboriginal mythologies. It shares common elements with the Bible, both Old and New Testaments: Faith in the One personal God, Creator of heaven and earth, adored by Adam, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who spoke through the prophets of Israel, and who miraculously gave birth to Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary. But at the same time, the Qur'ān bears a prophecy that is foreign to both Judaism and Christianity. It tells stories of ancient prophets unknown to the Biblical tradition, refuses the Incarnation, and refutes the death of Jesus on the Cross as well as his resurrection.

Having said this, I believe devotional recitation of the Qur'ān is not an appropriate Christian practice. Such practice might lead simple and uneducated Christian believers into syncretism. The complete freedom that Jesus gives us cannot put at risk the weaker of us who would, maybe, not be able to analyze the different layers at stake in the use of other religious traditions in their Christian devotion. Reading the Qur'ān as one's Christian devotion can only be used as a personal practice.

Why would we, Christians, want to read the Qur'ān in our personal devotion? First, we want to be nice to our Muslim neighbors. Since for them the Qur'ān is the most sublime expression of the word of God in a human language and the ultimate revelation of His will, we want to show respect to the text because we see it pleases them immensely when we do. Another incentive to read the Qur'ān is its intrinsic beauty, especially when read in Arabic. Its prose, rhyme, as well as recitation (*taēwīd*) moves anyone who has a feeling for the transcendent. Lastly, the Qur'ān is a major object of the human world culture, which triggered a whole civilization that has produced wonderful fruit. Reading the Qur'ān can surely be a beautiful spiritual experience for a Christian, for one or more of the reasons expressed above: friendship, transcendental beauty, cultural value.

***Edwin: Is it appropriate to include readings from the Qur'ān in Christian liturgies (for example, one of the Qur'ānic annunciation-narratives in a Christmas carol service)?<sup>11</sup>***

**Druel:** Using non-Christian texts or music or religious artifacts in a Christian liturgy is of course possible, for the same reasons mentioned above (friendship, transcendental beauty, cultural value), but for the same reasons mentioned above (weakness of some of us in front of too much complexity), it can only be done with discernment and explanations, and not in replacement of the

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<sup>11</sup>Dupuis supports the discerning use of non-Christian scripture in Christian worship, but the "Notification" appears to be criticizing this position when it argues that non-Christian scriptures should not be considered as complementary to the Old Testament (Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 253 for Dupuis' view, and 437 for the "Notification").

essential parts of liturgy but as an acknowledgment of the intrinsic beauty and value of these texts, music and artifacts.

Moreover, it seems to me that the use of the Qur'ān as a liturgical text in Christian assemblies could be seen as a lack of respect by Muslims. Indeed, Christian liturgy will always place the Gospel at the summit of the liturgy of the Word and can only place the Qur'ān in a subsidiary position, which may seem offensive to Muslims.

***Edwin: What, positively, can Christians learn from the Qur'ān? How can the Qur'ān enrich Christians?***

**Druel:** If Qur'ānic recitation can easily move us by its beauty, reading the Qur'ān is often a confusing experience: its style is very different from that of the Bible and the text is so allusive that a Christian reader can easily get the impression that it is poorly constructed at a literary level. Some passages will sound familiar whereas others will seem violent or divisive. In other terms, Christians may learn nothing interesting or nourishing from the Qur'ān if they are not accompanied in their reading by a Muslim friend or if they do not read a commentary along with it, especially a spiritual one.

If they do, they can discover that for many Muslims, the *existence* of the Qur'ān is practically more important than its *content*. That some individual verses have gained more importance than full passages. That the example of the Prophet is by very far more important than the Qur'ān in the lives of Muslims and that Christians tend to overrate the text over the living tradition of the Prophet.

To put it simply, in Islam, the Qur'ān is the uncreated Word of God and its meaning is difficult to grasp. But Muslims will enjoy hearing it, even without understanding, as in a contemplation act through which they would seek a deepening of their faith or simply as a way to purify a place. It is very common that shopkeepers and taxi drivers play the Qur'ānic recitation while they drive. They do not engage with its content or meaning but only with its divine power and sanctity. In order to understand God's will better, Muslims would rather turn to the life of the Prophet (*sīra*) and the prophetic traditions (*hadīth*), which together form the Tradition (*sunna*).

Wouldn't a Christian do *the opposite* by seeking to understand the Qur'ān without worshipping it and without the *sunna*? What sense would it have to engage with the Qur'ān in a way that Muslims themselves do not?

**Edwin:** *Does the Islamic view of the Qur'ān as the central locus of revelation, with every word being of direct divine origin, generate an "all or nothing" character about response to the Qur'ān, making it difficult for Christians to offer an appreciative but inevitably selective response, affirming some elements within the Qur'ān and disagreeing with others? How do Muslims respond to a selectively positive view of the Qur'ān*

**Druel:** The idea of picking portions of the Qur'ān that I would appreciate is probably as repelling to a Muslim as the idea of picking portions of the Bible to a Christian. Reading the Qur'ān with Christian theological glasses, assessing its discourse, appreciating its content, criticizing some parts and praising others, can be a Christian theological exercise but never an interreligious activity. There are a few Muslim scholars who study Christian theology. Maybe they could understand the exercise. But I believe that most Muslim scholars would not. In an interreligious setting, Christians would ask Muslims to talk about the Qur'ān. They could eventually challenge them on specific points, but in no way is interreligious dialogue the place to "evaluate" the Qur'ān from a Christian perspective.

**Edwin:** *How do we assess the view of the Qur'ān as "late Christian apocrypha"? This view is proposed by the Protestant writer F. Peter Ford, Jr. in his essay, "The Qur'ān as Sacred Scripture: an Assessment of Contemporary Christian Perspectives," The Muslim World 83 (1993), 142-164. If accepted, what are its implications? What other ways are there of expressing positive Christian recognition of the Qur'ān*

**Druel:** I am not sure to completely understand what "positive Christian recognition" means. Is it a kind of cultural (religious, for that matter) appropriation? The Qur'ān has an intrinsic value, which is not connected to Christianity. From the Qur'ānic perspective,

(as mentioned earlier) the Jewish and Christian scriptures are made obsolete by this new revelation that amends, completes, expands, and fulfils them. To be sure, this applies to the actual Jewish and Christian texts as received and transmitted, not to the eternal, untouched versions of these scriptures. Islamic scholars have developed various interpretations of the complex relations between Islam and its predecessors: either Islam is seen as a revelation for the Arabs, just like other peoples had their specific revelations; or it is seen as the latest attempt by God to reveal His will to a people that will hopefully preserve it better than the others; or it is seen as the latest stage of God's pedagogy, between the harsh Jewish laws and the highly spiritual Christian laws. Just like Christian scholars do not need to know how Jewish scholars evaluate Christianity to elaborate their own theology, Muslim scholars do not need to know how Jews and Christians interpret their own religions. If I go back to the question, Christians can study Islam and the Qur'ān as they would study any other human cultural and religious endeavor to reach the divine, without having to cherry-pick what they like or dislike. But I would be very reluctant to indulge in what really seems to me to be a dominant, disrespectful approach: to harvest in Islam (or the Qur'ān) whatever "seed of truth" that would pass the test of my own tradition. Doing this would make me insensitive to the inner beauty and consistency of Islam, as well as its radical difference.

***Edwin: How do we assess the argument that the forms of Christianity criticized by the Qur'ān are heretical, and that therefore the Qur'ān should not be understood as critical of orthodox Christianity?***

***Druel:*** The primary focus of the Qur'ān is not to criticize Christianity but to encourage pagan Arabs to renounce polytheism because the Day of Judgment is near. Moreover, recent Islamic scholarship (see the works of Gabriel Reynolds, for example) acknowledges that the Qur'ān cannot be a source of information on Arab Christianity in the Peninsula, with which the Prophet Muhammad would have had contacts, simply because there is a polemical context at play. Early academic research on the Qur'ān

tried to identify the Christian communities with which the Prophet could have been in contact, trying to reconstruct their creed from what is mentioned in the Qur'ān. But if one considers this issue from the polemical point of view of the Qur'ān, one discovers that the Qur'ān uses rhetorical tools at its disposal in the Arabic culture to make its point understood (metaphor, exaggeration, curse, etc., which we find in the Bible as well). For example, no known Christian group has ever believed that the Virgin Mary was one of the Trinity (Qur'ān 5 *al-Mā'ida*, 116) but by using this shocking image, the Qur'ān may intend to wake its audience and excite them to monotheism.

The Qur'ān *is* critical of the main dogmas of Christianity (Incarnation, Trinity, Resurrection). It may be possible to mitigate this criticism locally, in this or that verse that can be understood differently and reconciled with the Christian faith. But that would certainly not be fair to the Islamic understanding of the Qur'ān. For example, we as Christians can always try to understand the verse *lam yalid wa-lam yūlad* (Qur'ān 112 *al-Ikhlāc*, 3 “He did not beget nor was he begotten”) as not contradicting the Incarnation because we do not believe that the Son was “made” through a sexual relation (implied in the Arabic verb *walada*, *yalidu*). In the end, the entirety of the Islamic Tradition *did* receive this verse as a refutation of the Incarnation. So what is our aim? To create a “Christian-compatible” reading of the Qur'ān that never existed? And we expect Muslims to find this interesting?

***Edwin: Should Christians accept the application of the historical-critical method to the Qur'ān, as with Biblical criticism? Or should they avoid it, conscious that for many Muslims it appears to be an attack on their faith and therefore could damage Christian-Muslim relations?***

***Druel:*** Scholars in Islamic studies (who could be Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or atheist) should apply scientific, critical, historical methods when dealing with the text of the Qur'ān, and no other method. Or maybe the question intends those Christian theologians who wish to engage into the (Christian theological) study of the Qur'ān. And then my question is: why? How can they

avoid “assessing” the text? How can these Christian theologians hope to understand the inner consistency of the text if they look at it with Christian glasses and constantly adopt a Christian perspective? Why not simply “forget” that they are Christians and study the text with scientific methods? Lastly, we should also not forget that some Muslim scholars did and still do have a critical approach to the text of the Qur’ān, questioning its foreign vocabulary, the discrepancy of its grammar with what became standard, the similarities and differences with the text of the Bible. These should also be studied.

***Edwin: Is it appropriate for Christians to interpret the Qur’ān in ways that harmonize with Christian doctrine but go against mainstream Islamic interpretation? Is it relevant to this question to note that the converse certainly applies in the long and continuing tradition of Muslim interpretation of the Bible in ways that harmonize with Islamic doctrine?***

***Druel:*** Why on earth would a Christian want to interpret the Qur’ān in a way that fits the Christian faith? Just like Christians find the Islamic commentaries on the Gospel to be very short-sighted and partial, I can only imagine Muslims reject Christian harmonized readings. Muslim scholars who indulge in this kind of interpretation of the Gospel would, for example, believe that the *paráklētos* (John 14 16) is the Prophet Muhammad. At best, this interpretation is interesting to Christians who want to know how some Muslims read the Gospel. How should it be different when Christians try to harmonize the text of the Qur’ān with their faith?

***Edwin: Can Muslim-Christian dialogue helpfully discuss the Qur’ān’s claim to be a scripture in the line of the Torah and the Gospel? Can Muslim and Christian scholars fruitfully explore the relationship between the Bible as it now exists and the original Torah and Gospel conceived of by Muslims, along with the process of corruption (tahrīf) of the original scriptures widely believed by Muslims to have taken place?***

***Druel:*** We have learned from over seventy years of Islamic-Christian dialogue that we should avoid creating a “third creed”,

that would please the actors of this dialogue but be neither Islamic nor Christian. Rather, Islamic-Christian dialogue should first and foremost be about *listening* to the way other believers live their faith, and focus on how to hold together in peace and freedom these different, if not contradicting, faiths. The aim of dialogue can never be to come to an *agreement* on how to read the Qur'ān. From an Islamic perspective, the Qur'ān is clearly a scripture in line of the Torah and the Gospel, whereas the Christian perspective discovered the Qur'ān and its claim as a threat to its own identity. My question is not whether we can reconcile these two views but why should we? Cannot we live at peace with the fact that the Qur'ān says it fulfils our scriptures? Are we so weak in our own identities that we cannot explore this claim? Study how it works? Consider what is at stake? We will be surprised to discover that the theory of “falsification” (*tahrīf*) is first and foremost a theological tool, not a philological one. It serves as a theological justification for the very necessity of the Qur'ānic revelation, not for the evaluation of quality of this or that passage in the text (although some Islamic polemicists would use it for that purpose).

Interestingly, the Islamic perspective on Judaism and Christianity seems to be tolerant since it “includes” them, as Muslims would often say. And they genuinely believe that we are the ones creating the problems, by refusing to reciprocate. This is typical of a false dialogue where one refuses to listen to what the other has to say about himself and impose instead one's own understanding. Judaism and Christianity, as understood by the Qur'ān and the Islamic tradition, has very little to do with these actual religions. In this case, “reciprocating” would only be tantamount to becoming Muslim.

***Edwin: Can dialogue between Muslim and Christian scholars helpfully explore more fully the similarities between the intra-Christian debates about Christ leading to the Creeds and the intra-Muslim debates about the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'ān***

***Druel: Intra-Christian debates about Christ (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries) and intra-Muslim debates about the createdness of the Qur'ān (10<sup>th</sup>-***

11<sup>th</sup> centuries) have had no reciprocal influence on one another. The Islamic debate over createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'ān is often mistaken by Christians (and sometimes Muslims!) as forbidding exegesis. Since the Qur'ān is uncreated it should not be interpreted, as we would often hear and repeat. In the Islamic tradition, the dogma of the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān addresses the issue of the unity of God and not of the interpretation of His word. Is the Word of God one of his attributes (*sifāt*) or is it a creature, or what is it? Rationalist theologians were very reluctant to consider the Word of God as uncreated because they immediately saw the difficulty of it being co-eternal to Him, opening the door to some plurality in eternity and associationism (*shirk*). Supporters of the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān feared that considering the Word of God a creature would diminish its status by putting it at the same level as angels and humans. Interestingly, the dominant view, i.e., the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān, leaves unanswered the question of the plurality in eternity, as does the Sufi view of the eternity of the Muhammadian Light (*al-nūr al-muhammadī*).

It could be interesting to explore the similarities in the debates about the uncreatedness of the Word of God in Islam and the eternity of the second Person of the Trinity identified with the Logos in Christianity. Personally, I would be delighted to attend such a workshop!

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this fruitful conversation with Druel, the interviewer recognize that it is really important to distinguish different fields—Christian or Islamic theology, religious sciences, and interreligious dialogue—that have little in common in their aims and methodologies. However, it is possible to deal with the Qur'ān in all these fields. The kind of questions that are dealt with in Islamic theology are: How can we, as Muslims, draw the will of God from the Qur'ān? What are the abrogated verses? Does a given verse express a general or a particular ruling? When scholars study the Qur'ān in an academic setting, they do it in a historical and critical perspective: What do we know of the historical context of the Qur'ān? What are the relations between it and the other religious texts? Can we use it

as historical evidence? Can we identify successive redactions? Lastly, we Muslims and Christians together talk about the Qur'ān in interreligious dialogue. In this case, Christians would be listening to Muslims, asking them how they read it, what their relation is with the text, what place it has in their daily devotion, and how a given dogma is developed and articulated with other dogmas. Interreligious dialogue is not a tool to convince Muslims, nor to study the Qur'ān critically, nor to harmonize between the Qur'ān and the Christian faith. If we are not aware of these different fields, we risk many frustrations.

There is a last field where the Qur'ān could be studied, namely. Christian theology, which Druel pointed out as the background of most of the questions that I raised in the interview with him: Is the Qur'ān another revelation? What can Christians learn from it? Can we read it in our liturgies? Druel categorically pointed out that he never engaged into this kind of research. Such research, he told me, seems to him to be tantamount to “using” the Qur'ān to fit Christian imagination, far from its Islamic context.

Druel further points out that he understands the legitimacy of the questions: The Qur'ān presents itself as the fulfillment of the previous scriptures, and as Christians we can explore the place of Islam (and hence its sacred text) in the salvation plan of God (and hence in our Christian faith). However, he says that he is much more interested in the “strange beauty” of Islam than in the potential fruit some of its elements can bear in his Christian life. We are obviously free to do whatever we want with the Qur'ān but we should not believe that this will increase in any way our understanding of Islam as it is nor will it improve our relations with Muslims. Rather, it will only create a “Christianized Qur'ān”—but who needs this?

Lastly, our conversation expanded a bit to include a Muslim friend of Druel who is a PhD candidate in Princeton University. Druel suggested that instead of him reflecting on how Muslims would react to such and such questions, he would share his responses with the Muslim friend at Princeton University and ask her directly what she felt of the questions and the responses. Druel told the interviewer that she felt strangely about some of the questions.

For example, about using the Qur'ān in Christian liturgies, she answered: "We do not necessarily want you using our liturgy if you are Christian because we get it... you have your own liturgy." She referred to the verse *lakum dīnukum wa-liya dīn* (Qur'ān 109 *al-Kāfirūn*, 6 "To you is your religion, and to me is my religion").

She felt that anything that could be interpreted as trying to draw someone out of their religion, such as encouraging Christians to read the Qur'ān in their liturgies, should be avoided. She added: "These are not our concerns when it comes to interfaith dialogue. We want to know about the Gospels, especially because there was historical engagement to fill in some of the narrative gaps. We also are genuinely interested in how to approach Christianity; there is so much polemic on both sides that we want to ask questions and be respectful."

Conversations must continue, *appreciating the differences* by *listening* to one another for mutual understanding and undergirded by mutual respect. The quality of listening makes all the difference in an ongoing conversation between Christians and Muslims.

*Faith in God, professed by the spiritual descendants of Abraham—Christians, Muslims and Jews—when it is lived sincerely, when it penetrates life, is a certain foundation of the dignity, brotherhood and freedom of men and a principle of uprightness for moral conduct and life in society. And there is more: as a result of this faith in God the Creator and transcendent, one man finds himself at the summit of creation. He was created, the Bible teaches, 'in the image and likeness of God' (Gn 1:27); for the Qur'an, the sacred book of the Muslims, although man is made of dust, 'God breathed into him his spirit and endowed him with hearing, sight and heart,' that is, intelligence (Surah 32.8).*

**John Paul II, Address to the Catholic Community of Ankara, Turkey, November 29, 1979**