

Crossing the Threshold of Hope: John Paul II and Tariq Ramadan's Approaches to the Traditional Hermeneutics of Relation with the “Religious Other”

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Abstract

with an eye towards the development of the exegetical tradition of Catholic hermeneutics on relation with the Jews, the article briefly surveys the development of the hermeneutical tradition of the relation and attitude of the Catholic Church towards the Jews and Judaism over the centuries, especially through the prism of the acts of St John Paul II and his relationship with the Jewish people. The paper proposes that Islam can profit from the same approach, and Tariq Ramadan, a scion of Hasan al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood) offers a hypothesis of what he calls “necessary diversity” on how Islam can coexist peacefully with other religious traditions, especially the *ahl al-Kitāb* (people of the Book) – Jews and Christians.

Keywords: *ahl al-Kitāb*; Paradigm shift, Peccatum Gravissimum, “religious other”

Introduction

According to Paul Faller, Ferdinand Deist defines a paradigm shift as “the complex of convictions, values, and a world view shared by a scientific community which provides its philosophical framework for valid academic inquiry.” Paradigm shift guides scientific activities until a lists of discrepancies surface within it to produce a sense of crisis. A new method is then sorted by the scientific community to accommodate these new anomalies and allow old data to be interpreted in a new way. What Thomas Kuhn refers to as a 'scientific revolution' or a 'shift in paradigm', is one which then transform the world in which the scientific work was done and leads the profession to new commitments. The deficiency of the old method to ask the relevant question or produce the required result is addressed and is replaced with a new one (Faller, p.1). Hermeneutics of scriptures can profit from this approach.

There has been a tremendous advancement in biblical scholarship, aided by science and technology, which has in turn resulted in better understanding and application of the Christian text. We however acknowledge that in the past, due to certain limitations, such as a “closed minded” interpretation of texts,

scripture was employed as the basis upon which atrocity was committed against “non-conformists” or those who differ in thought, resulting in gross violation of the rights of individuals and an entrenched culture of religious intolerance.

This study demonstrates that within the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), are passages in their texts, which properly understood, can result in a shift in the hermeneutical tradition of scriptural passages, and in accordance with modern context, without losing the meaning of the texts.

The paper proposes the approach of St. John Paul II as a catalyst for re-defining the hermeneutical traditions of Islam on relations with people of other faith traditions; especially the understanding of the controversial Q. 9:5, also infamously referred to as the “verse of the sword.” Tariq Ramadan offers an approach that fits this bill with his claim to the “necessity of diversity.”

The study will be limited to John Paul II' reference to the Jewish tradition as a “living Heritage”, against the “sur-plantation” approach of previous generations; and the hypothesis of “necessity of diversion” of Tariq Ramadan as model for Islam in relation with people of other religious traditions, especially Jews and Christians.

Can God Revoke His Promises and Call? A New Hermeneutical Understanding

Before the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, one issue that haunted both Jewish and Christian theology was the question of whether God can change His mind. For Martin Buber and the Jewish people, God's covenant cannot be revoked. While admiring the artistic beauty and greatness of the Romanesque cathedral of the city of Worms. Buber was drawn to the Jewish cemetery nearby the cathedral which was established in 1067-77; the oldest perhaps in Europe. The remains of dead men and women in the cemetery he says evokes decay and chaos but is also a sign of a covenant that has not been cancelled despite everything that has happened to the Jewish people (Sievers, p. 25).

The break with Judaism was the definitive oedipal event in the history of Christianity, because with the decision to turn their back on the traditions and faith of their fathers. The [apostles] leaders of the young Church redirected their energies towards more ambitious – yet paradoxically more practical – goal of spreading the Gospel to the ends of the world. A brilliant idea that saw Christianity spread to the nook and crannies of the Roman empire to become the religion of the Empire. From an ideology and a minor Jewish sect to a major player in the affairs of the world (Cf. Hood, p. 1-18).

The idea that God's gifts and call are irrevocable asserted by St. Paul was a challenge to most Church Fathers, who saw Christianity as taking the place of Judaism and Christians, the place of the Jewish people as the New Israel. This idea known as 'supersessionism' is also known as 'replacement theology'. Ironically it was the same St. Paul, who was the first Christian figure to hold that the Jewish law is no longer valid. The development of his Christian theology was basically a polemic against Judaism, which some scholars see as the basis for Christian anti-Judaism. However, properly understood, he posited that "God's gifts and call are irrevocable" in his Christology, which alleges an exclusive relationship between Christ and the Law, and the possibility of a future for Israel as Israel (Cf. Getty, p.1).

The medieval also had their say on the debate about Judaism and Christianity, and like all medieval Christian theologians, Aquinas the most famous of them believed that Judaism was designed by God to prefigure Christ and to make him recognizable when he manifests, thus, the entire history of the Jewish people had been *preparatio Christi* (ST I q.23). With the Crucifixion, the curtain on this sacred drama had been lowered. The ritual practices of the Jews—circumcision, sacrifice, and keeping the sabbath, were henceforth blasphemous and loathsome in the sight of God. The Jews had a choice: accept Christ or perish! (Hood, p. 62-76).

For Aquinas, Christ is the nexus of history as prior to his Incarnation all events prefigured and prepared the way for him. With his Resurrection, the spread of the Gospel, and the development of Christian doctrine as the dominant theme, with migration of peoples, the rise and fall of empires, everything draws meaning from some connection with the drama of salvation history or else it is trivial or merely profane (Hood, p. 38-61).

According to Lloyd Gaston, Jesus was primarily a fulfilment of God's promise to Israel in order that the Jews would be a light to the nations. To say that the Jewish tradition serves as an indispensable heritage for Christianity, implies that this heritage is still living and active in terms of contemporary Judaism. Anything to the contrary will amount to an insult to the millions of Jews who are not only alive but actively practicing Judaism (Cf. Pawlikowski, p. 16.). Lloyd Gaston maintained that Paul did not call for the abandonment of the Torah but strived to legitimize a separate way of salvation for the nations apart from the observance of the Torah (Cf. Gaston, (1982), 400-23). According to Buguslawski, Getty argues that upon careful consideration, in Rom. 11:25-32, Paul does not spiritualize nor replace 'historical, real, physical Israel his own people and kin through the inclusion of the Gentiles'. She rejects any suggestion based on substitutionary theories because it risks attributing to Paul a modern anti-Semitic bias (Buguslawski, p.133).

It is practically impossible to exhaust the list of scholars who have made contributions on the verse under consideration. Many commentaries only exist in manuscript form, and many are inaccessible, especially after the medieval period to the early 19th century, owing to lack of exegetical activity, which seemed to be the case on the Catholic side. On the Protestant divide, there was relatively, a robust exegetical activity and concern for biblical theology. But with the promulgation of *Divino afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII, the Catholic fervour for scriptural and biblical theology was rekindled (Fitzmyer, p.132), and it is this awakening that resulted in the progress recorded in Vatican II leading to the “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions” (*Nostra Aetate*). The Fathers of the Council rejected the idea that all Jews were guilty of the Crucifixion of Jesus – *Peccatum Gravissimum*, made the declaration that the persecution of the Jews is immoral, and mandated catechists and other religious teachers to refrain from the statement that “the Jews should be spoken of as rejected or cursed people” (Hood, p. 9-14).

Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue

The Second Vatican Council (1962- 1965) marks a watershed in the history of the Catholic Church's relations with other religious traditions. The Church moved away from a position of default hostility and spoke positively of Judaism and Islam. It is important to reference past Magisterial teachings on Judaism and Islam for us to understand the gravity of the paradigm shift of the Second Vatican Council on the relation with other religious traditions. One of such Magisterial teaching is that of Pope Leo XIII's Consecration of the human race to Christ the King in which the faithful entreated Christ to be the “King of all those who are still involved in the darkness of idolatry or of Islamism (*qui in tenebris idolatriae aut islamismi adhuc versantur*) and refused to be drawn into the light and kingdom of God” that was suppressed in 1959. In the same year several formulas were abolished. Before then Muslim converts to Christianity were warned to abhor the Muhammedan perfidy (*Muhumeticam perfidam*) and to reject the wicked sect of unbelievers (*pravam sectam infidelitatis*).¹ Although Judaism is not mentioned by name in this document, we can deduce that she too is viewed in the same light being at variance with the Christological truth of Christianity. When considered against the backdrop of these Magisterial formulas, the Second Vatican Council's teaching on Judaism and Islam assumes a more profound significance and becomes clear on how the Church related with Judaism and Islam before and after, in the history of her engagement with Judaism and Islam. The creation of the Roman Curia for relations with believers of other religions known as the Secretariate for Non-Christians in 1964, later

¹ See Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary (Office of Indulgence), “Actus dedicationis humani generis Iesu Christo Regis”, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 51 (1959), 595-596, Sacred Congregation of Rites, “Variationes in Missali et in Rituali Romano in Precibus pro Iudaeis”, *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 74 (1960), pp. 133-134.

renamed Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews 1974 marked the Church's new orientation in numerous initiatives of Christian-Muslim, and Christian-Jewish encounters (Cf. Cucarella, p. 7). For many, this new initiative will replace the hostilities of past centuries and usher in a shared future of fraternal longing to understand each other and work together for the common good of humanity.

John Paul II and the *Peccatum Gravissimum* of the Jews

Without doubt, the pontificate of John Paul II remains on record as the one in which Christian-Jewish relations became a focal papal priority. No previous Pope had spoken with force and elaborately about the Church's relationship with the Jewish people. The papacy of John XXII and that of Paul VI need to be celebrated for their effort in the relations with the Jewish people, especially the development of the chapter four of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, but neither of these popes provided the comprehensive outlook of the Christian-Jewish relations that occasioned the papacy of John Paul II.

Born Karol Wojtyla in 1920, in the Polish town of Wadowice, John Paul II had many Jewish friends and neighbours, and he was an eyewitness of the Holocaust. A few months before the war ended, Wojtyla had rescued a Jewish girl whom he saw starving at a train station by carrying her to the rail car in which he was travelling, feeding her and covering her with his coat. He later saved more Jewish people.

After he was elected pope in 1978, John Paul II made strident efforts towards improving relations between Jews and Catholics. Frequently meeting with Jewish leaders, he condemned the anti-Semitic atrocities meted on the Jews, commemorated the Holocaust, and established diplomatic relations with Israel (Cf. Washington Post of April 8, 2005; Arutz Sheva, MSN.com, April 3, 2005).

The history of the relations between Jews and Christians has been a negative and tormented one. The Holy Father, St. John Paul II recognized this, and repeatedly appealed to Catholics to see where we stand with regards our relations with Jewish people. In spite of the admonition to Christians to preach and practice love for all, even for one's enemies, the prevailing mentality down the centuries penalized minorities and those who 'differ'. Sentiments of anti-Semitism in some Christian quarters led to general discrimination which sometimes led to expulsion and forced conversion. Most Jews from time immemorial have held on to their religious traditions and customs which were, and in some cases still looked upon with suspicion and mistrust, resulting in *scapegoatism*. In times of crisis such as famine, war, pestilence, or social tension, the Jewish minority became the victim of violence, looting and even massacres. This is in spite of the equal status that Jews had achieved by the end of the 18th

and the beginning of the 19th centuries with other citizens in most states, with some of them even holding influential positions in their societies. In that historical context, notably in the 19th century, a false and exacerbated sense of nationalism took hold in many European countries, and in turn fuelled by some theories which appear to deny the unity of the human race, affirming an original diversity of race, coupled with the accusation that Jews exercise an influence disproportionate to their numbers, there began to spread varying degrees of anti-Semitism throughout most of Europe, but mostly intense in Germany (Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda), which was more sociological than religious (Cf. Cassidy, p. 6.).

The Church recognizes and regrets the errors and failures of her sons and daughters, some of whom were hesitant to open their borders to the persecuted Jews. The horror of the experience is captured by these words of Cardinal Cassidy who said “the closing of borders to Jewish [immigrants] in those circumstances [of persecution], whether due to anti-Jewish hostility or suspicion, political cowardice or short-sightedness, national selfishness, lays a heavy burden [on the conscience of those in authority]”, and especially Church authorities who should have known better (Cassidy, p. 6.). While we deeply regret the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the Church, we resolve and make our own what is said in *Nostra Aetate*, which unequivocally affirms that “mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews and motivated by the Gospel's spiritual love and by no political consideration, deplores the hatred, persecution and display of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source (Cassidy, p. 4)

We must stress that St. John Paul II did not make any systematic commentary on Rom. 11: 29, as such, but that his pontificate concretely expressed the teachings of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra aetate*. His insistence that Judaism and the Jewish traditions serves as an indispensable heritage for Christianity buttresses the point that “God's gifts and call to the Jewish people is irrevocable.” His pilgrimage to Auschwitz, the Synagogue in Rome, and Israel are listed among the greatest of the twentieth century's spiritual journeys. He recalled with nostalgia the fond memories of his childhood in Krakow, Poland before, during and after the Second World War, his relationship with Jewish neighbours, but most especially how he cooperated with the Jewish communities and leaders all over the world to create a bond of brotherhood and friendship based on the common heritage of the Jews and Christians. He appealed to Catholics to renew the awareness of the Hebrew root of their faith, keeping in mind that Jesus was a descendant of David, and the Virgin Mary, the Apostles and many first converts to the Christian faith belonged to the Jewish people. Noting that the Church draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree, on which has been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (Cf. Rom.11:17-24); that the Jews

are beloved brothers and sisters to the Christians, and indeed in a certain sense, elder brothers and sisters to the Christians (Cf. Eugene J.F & Leon, K.).

In an address to the leaders of Jewish communities in Strasbourg in 1988 St. John Paul II said:

“I repeat again with you the strongest condemnation of anti-Semitism and racism, which are opposed to the principles of Christianity.” In an address to the Diplomatic Corps of the Vatican in 1994, he said:

The Catholic Church therefore repudiates every persecution against a people or human groups anywhere, at any time. She absolutely condemns all forms of genocide, as well as the racist ideologists which give rise to them. Looking back over this century, we are deeply saddened by the violence that has enveloped whole groups of peoples and nations. We recall in particular the massacre of the Armenians, the countless victims in Ukraine in the 1930s, the genocide of the Gypsies, which was also the result of racist ideas, and similar tragedies which have occurred in America, Africa, and the Balkans. Nor do we forget the millions of victims of totalitarian ideology in the Soviet Union, in China, Cambodia, and elsewhere. Nor can we forget the drama of the Middle East, the elements of which are well known, even as we make this reflection, “many human beings are still their brothers' victims (Cassidy, p.8.).

Nothing more summarizes and contributes to the extraordinariness of this twenty-first century Father of the Church than the fact that the Pope was crystal clear on the point referring to Judaism as 'living heritage' for Christianity. By so doing, he repudiated the centuries long mindset in Christianity, depicted on the façade of the Cathedral in Strasbourg, France, and duplicated in many other European churches, where the church is presented as a bright beautiful young woman holding a book of the Gospel while Judaism is depicted as a bent over, blindfolded woman holding a copy of the Torah. The message could not be more clearly stated: with the coming of Christ, Judaism became a 'dead' religion, whatever its greatness prior to the Christ Event. But for St. John Paul II, unlike the artist of the façade “on the Strasbourg Cathedral, the Jewish tradition, biblical and postbiblical, remains a living faith tradition that Christianity can continue to draw from in developing its theology and spirituality. In fact, it must draw upon Judaism if it is to be authentic to itself” (Cf. Pawlikowski, p. 16.).

On a final note, behind the establishment of diplomatic relations with the state of Israel in June of 1994, which marks one of the focal points of St. John Paul II' relation with the Jewish people (he movingly spoke of Judaism' spiritual attachment to the city of Jerusalem before the signing of the diplomatic

relations), the final repudiation of a theology of perpetual wandering for the Jewish community on the part of Christianity, something that began with the Church Fathers, stands out uniquely.

John Paul II' approach and his accomplishments with respect to the theological and political implications of Israel for the Catholic-Jewish Dialogue like all human endeavours is not fool-proof, but it nevertheless represents a shift in attitude, and undid centuries of systematic reproach and persecution of the Jews. Thanks to the revolutionary document; the Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, which the Pontiff treated as having the equivalent of a dogmatic statement. The decisiveness of *Nostra Aetate* can be seen from the evaluation of Cardinal Willerbrands, first President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, who stated that "Never, I repeat never before had a systematic, positive, comprehensive, careful and daring presentation of the Jews and Judaism been made in the Church by a pope or a council. This should not be lost sight of" (Bemporad, (2016), p. 6.).

The Pontiff' approach could therefore be a catalyst for the renewal of the hermeneutical tradition of Muslims towards the 'religious other'.

The New Challenge of Hermeneutics for Muslim Exegetes

Islamic discourse today is polarised in the response to the challenges of modernity, especially on the compatibility of Islam with modernity and the question of religious intolerance. Beyond the opprobrium generated by *Boko Haram* and other terrorists' activities to the polarisation in Islam and instead of an outright condemnation, the section of this article argues for a revisit of the hermeneutical tradition of Islam on key text that seemingly encourage religious intolerance.

Muslims believe the Qur'an to be the Word of Allah, but in all its historical manifestation like the religious text of other religions, 'exegetes' have subjected it to all manners of interpretations. While experts of the scripture must find ways of making the text understandable, they can all too often arrogate to themselves power as the sole interpreters of the mind of Allah, thus, possessing sole authority over the divine text (Musindai, p.19.) This approach and attitude is not exclusive to Muslims because the *sola scriptura* disposition by fundamental Christians, completely robs the Christian text of its human input and portrays it as something that fell down directly from the heavens.

There is no want of verses in the Qur'an that speak of the possibility of dialogue with non-Muslims, especially Jews and Christians.

Perhaps one of the most innovative and radical attempts at interpreting the Qur'an in modern times was by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of India (d. 1898), who

published a six-volume work on the Qur'an from 1879. He believed that Muslims need to reassess their tradition, heritage, and ways of thought in consonance with newly emerging dynamics. In his opinion, the divide between Western and Islamic ways of thinking is vast, and Muslim scholars who are educated in the West or influenced by Western education are no longer able to comprehend the religious discourse of the *ulamas*, which threatens the relevance of Islam as a religion for modern Muslims (Cf. Saeed, p. 11).

Muslim scholars like Muhammad 'Abduh, Mahmūd Shaltūr (d. 1963) and Muhammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1996) attempted to put forward new ideas for the interpretation of the Qur'an and relate its ethico-legal contents to the needs of the Muslims were viewed with hostility by the traditionalist *ulama*, who labelled this new approach as anti-Islam, thereby limiting the influence of this new approach among the wider Muslim population (Cf. Saeed, p. 13.).

The traditionalists *ulama* viewed with particular suspicion and hostility the challenge to traditionally held assumptions about Islam and its interpretative tradition, its early history, and its primary sources (Qur'an and Hadith). This is because studies undertaken by Western scholars of Islam such as Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) and Joseph Schacht (d. 1969), and some Muslim scholars influenced by them had cast doubt about the assumption held by Muslims on the authenticity and historical reliability of the Hadith. One of the sources of Islamic jurisprudence was suddenly claimed to be baseless and lacking the authority it has claimed and wielded for centuries. Other studies also questioned the historical narrative of the *Sīrah* (biography of the Prophet Muhammad) and the documentation of the Qur'an. These views and challenges were seen by the traditionalist as threatening the very essence of Islam. This critical look and challenge to the traditional views of the Qur'an and the hadith provided an impetus towards a more critical outlook by Muslim scholars such as Tariq Ramadan who made powerful arguments for the re-examination of the hermeneutical and theological approaches to Islamic text and its teaching and principles on relations with other faith traditions, and especially Jews and Christians (Cf. Saeed, p.13.).

Tariq Ramadan: A New Hermeneutical Approach

Tariq Ramadan comes to mind as an example of a modern Muslim. He is a Swiss Muslim academic, philosopher, and writer. He was a professor contemporary Islamic studies at St Anthony College, Oxford, and the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, but as of 2018, has taken an agreed leave of absence. Born in 1962, in Geneva, Switzerland, is married to Iman. His followership by young Muslims makes him an ideal choice. Although his controversial background sometimes surfaces to cast doubt on his claim as liberal Muslim because of his family connection (scion of the Founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), that gives rise to a lot of inuendo over the years.

Some of his detractors believe that Ramadan is a walking Brotherhood front, smooth talking, but with a forked tongue, that his calls for peace and dialogue apparently mask a secret agenda to Islamise Europe. The accusations that he has sexually assaulted women, has only served to galvanize his support base among young Muslims, especially moderates, who see these charges as an attempt by the Western media to discredit and gag a shining Muslim star.

Ramadan wants Muslims, particularly those in the West to think of themselves as absolutely part of modern society and advocates a push for Islam in the direction of human rights and equality of opportunity for all. His flip side has got him to clash too often with prominent figures in the West. In 2003, in a TV clash with Nicolas Sarkozy, then France' Minister of Interior, he called for a moratorium on corporal punishment across the Muslim world, which was construed as support for the stoning of women. The Rotterdam city Council, for which he worked as community adviser had 54 of his talks given in Arabic translated, after allegations surfaced that the tapes contained homophobic and misogynic contents. The report was declared inaccurate, but he was later fired for hosting an Iran regime sponsored program on Press TV.

The French journalist Caroline Fourest in her book *Frère Tariq* – 'Brother Tariq', laid out charges against him that included a visceral loyalty to the Muslim Brotherhood and the use of double discourse to fool non-Muslims. Meanwhile, the Mayor of Bordeaux Alain Juppé said Ramadan was not welcomed in the city owing to the ambiguity of his position on issues like secularism, men and women equality. But his very clear and repeated denunciation of anti-Semitism as un-Islamic, for a man of such a vast grassroot followership among young modern Muslims, comes as a beacon of hope to a relationship that has been strained for generations. Charges of anti-Semitism had been labelled against him for an article he wrote in 2003, accusing certain Jewish public figures, and non-Jewish ones of "communitarianism" for not denouncing Israeli human rights abuses against the Palestinians. In that article he said that if Muslim intellectuals are expected to condemn the acts of Saudi regime and terrorism or violence in Pakistan, Jewish intellectuals are supposed to do the same when it comes to Israel (Cf. Shariatmadari.)

For Ramadan the interpretation of "the literalists [which says that all Christians and Jews are infidels *kuffār* and that Islam is the only religion acceptable to Allah [God]]. This he says disagrees with Islam' universal teaching. That religion in the sight of God is Islam suggests to him [Ramadan] that surrender to God wherever it takes place, in whatever religion, is simply Islam" (Baum, p. 136).

Necessary Diversity: Arguments from the Qur'an

Created with free-will, men and women are at liberty to make their choices. These choices also include whether to accept or reject revelation. That the

creator created them male and female (Gen. 1:27, 5:2, Q. 42: 50) already implies a diversity. The following three seemingly similar qur'anic verses contain teachings that augment and complete each other: "Had God [Allah] so willed, He would have united the human beings in guidance, so do not be ignorant" (Q.6:35), "if your Lord had so willed, everyone on earth would have believed. Is it for you to compel people to be believers?" (Q. 10:99), "if God [Allah] had willed, He would have made you one community, but things are as they are to test you in what He has given you. So, compete with each other in doing good" (Q. 5:48). The first verse teaches that diversity is something willed by the creator Himself, the second makes it clear that in the name of that will, compulsion in matters of religion is forbidden, and the last verse instructs that these differences should be used to compete in doing good. And when you add the verse that says, "there's no compulsion in religion" (Q. 2:256) to these three, you discover that the Qur'an is not in short supply of verses that encourages dialogue and mutual coexistence. The problem for Muslim exegetes and theologians, is when the "doctrine of abrogation" (*Nashk* is an Arabic word usually translated as abrogation) is thrown into the fray of exegesis. In Islamic legal exegesis, *nashk* is a theory developed to resolve seemingly contradictory rulings of Islamic revelation by superseding or cancelling an earlier revelation, it complicates and 'almost' renders the dialogical appeal of these verses null and void. And that is where the genius of people like Tariq Ramadan comes into play. According to him, "[Situating the problematic verses in their historical context] allows one to see that they were uttered at occasions when the believing community was seriously challenged and Muslims were tempted to return to the religious traditions from which they came [and to combat those seen as traitors and enemies] the 'problematic' verse cannot be used to invalidate the more open teaching that religious pluralism is due to God's gracious design" (Baum, p. 137.).

The crisis of modernity as experienced by Muslims demanded and elicited various responses within the Islamic world. There are the traditionalists, the radical secularists, and there are the reformers, although one can add another type - the revisionists. This proposal makes sense because there are two different approaches that claim the label 'reformers.' There are also those who seek reformation of Islam through restoration - a *Ressourcement* (return to the sources) which finds correlation between 'pristine' pre-colonial Islamic culture/tradition and contemporary world. This position favours a classicist (anthropological static idealist) position of Islam and its tradition, and Islamic identity. This school, in my opinion, fits the description of the idealist that constructs how things should be in a romanticised manner. The idealist' approach cannot serve as a reliable interpretive framework for Islam in the modern, pluralist, and globalised world. The other type of reformers belong to what Aina calls the revisionist school which adopts what some Catholic

theologians call '*Aggiornamento*' (being up to date with the contemporary world). This school of thought within Islam, favours a historical consciousness (sociological dynamic realist) model. This is where Tariq Ramadan belongs, with all his questions and problems. This school fits the description of a critical realist: one who sees things as they are. Tariq Ramadan's response to the internal crisis within the Muslim world and its interaction with the modern world is very promising, refreshing, and hopeful. It is refreshing and risky, for instance, to proclaim that Islam today is largely full of ritualism and formalism without spirituality due to political/ideological manipulation of Islam. Hence, the heart of religion is missing in Islam – the heart being the sharing of common ground based on universal values common to all religions, and cultures. This common ground will lead to the emphasis on 'common citizenship' as against polarising emphasis on distinctive 'religious identity' (Cf. Aina 2010).

The nexus between these two personalities (John Paul II and Tariq Ramadan) is their re-reading and appeal for reconsideration of otherwise exclusive and controversial scriptural doctrines in the Christian and Islamic religion about the 'religious other' (Jews and Christians for John Paul II and Judaism and Christianity for Muslims). What Christianity and especially Catholicism profited from John Paul II, Islam can also profit from Tariq Ramadan. The exegetical novelties of these two personalities are worth emulating in a world that is increasingly becoming radical despite advancement in knowledge about the interrelatedness of the world and the common brotherhood of all men and women; and especially with the increasing rise in the cases of religious extremism in the world (antisemitism, jihadism and right wing Christians).

Conclusion

We cannot deny that many religious systems while obligating adherents to act rightly, sow seeds and predispositions that encourage the flouting of this ideal. Given the fact that we cannot redefine our scriptural texts as they have been given to us, yet we can solve the problem of the texts which exclude 'others' by de-emphasising those parts of the texts that discourage relations with 'others', and lay emphasis on those parts that encourage relations and cooperation with 'others.' The approach of St. John Paul II and Tariq Ramadan offers a solution on how to deescalate existing tensions across religious divide, and especially between Muslims and Christians.

To this end Muslims must strive to learn and understand by what essential traits Jews and Christians define themselves in the light of their own religious experience. What St. John Paul II said to the Jews applies here too: "It is equally necessary for Jews to understand the Church and Christians in terms that they define themselves" (Bemporad, (2016), p. 7.) Muslims should also strive to understand Jews and Christians in terms that they define themselves.

That differences exist is something that cannot be overemphasised. It serves as a check and balance mechanism so that no one group, race, or religion can lord it over others, which can lead to corruption. For Ramadan therefore, diversity serves a safeguarding mechanism to all religions (Ramadan, p. 600.), and the task of Muslim theologians is to teach their followers that the responsibility of humankind is to make use of these differences in establishing relationship based on the drive to excel in doing good.

Asking right-winged Muslim radicals to draw from the repositories of knowledge of John Paul II will probably not appeal to their sensibilities and pride, but nothing stops them from learning from *Frère Tariq* in their exegeses of the Islamic text.

There are too many politically and ideologically motivated conflicts in the world, and a world devoid of religiously motivated conflict, reduces the spheres of conflicts, and this can go a long way in making the world a safer place.

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