

Interfaith Perspectives on Reconciliation

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It was just after Jesus had (according to Luke's account) "set his face towards Jerusalem" (9:51) that he excoriated the people amongst whom he had lived, announcing to "the seventy disciples: 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago'" (10:13). Moreover, he had just rebuked two of his closest disciples, James and John, when they asked him (in the spirit of Elijah): "Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume [these Samaritans who refused us hospitality], with the words: 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are. The son of man came to save souls, not destroy them'" (9:55). It is a prominent feature of the gospels that Jesus' closest associates whom he would remind, on the eve of their slinking away, were rather friends than servants kept missing the point. Indeed, the rare ones who got it were a Samaritan woman, a pagan woman from the very region of Tyre and Sidon, and a Roman centurion: "I have not found faith like this in Israel" (Lk 7:10). Ironically enough, remarks like these were often construed by the successor community to belittle the Jews for their rejection of Jesus, while their manifest intent has to be to warn any in-group that the out-group may be better positioned to recognize the disruptive truth in what they have come to assimilate as their revelation. Had not Jesus, just before rebuking James and John, had to address some disciples intent on maintaining the boundaries of their group "Lord, some people were casting out demons in your name and we told them to stop," insisting: "Let them alone; whoever is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:50)? Finally, if the gospels are more proclamation than they are history, "the Pharisees" refers less to an historical group than it presages any set of religious leaders intent on preserving the integrity of their community, as they construe it.

So we are led inescapably to conclude that religious "others" will often provide the key to understanding the reaches of the faith we espouse, and even more strongly: should we link our adherence to that faith with a concomitant rejection of these "others," then we will have missed the point of the revelation offered us. Can our failure to recognize the crucial role which "other-believers" play in our own faith commitment be one of those cases where a clear gospel teaching

has remained obscure until events conspired to force us to acknowledge it?¹ For we have freely traded the epithet of “infidel” with Muslims from the crusades until quite recently, leaving it to western political leaders to resurrect now. Yet the prescient document from the second Vatican council, *Nostra Aetate*, renounced all that (while reminding us that Jews remain God’s covenanted people), by asserting that “Muslims . . . worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to [human beings]. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.”² Indeed, I would hope that a fringe benefit of these reflections could be to realize that the import of that singular document lies in bringing Christians to a keen appreciation of the role that those of other faiths can play in articulating our own, rather than offering counsel on the nugatory question of whether other-believers can be saved. For whatever “salvation” might mean, and its sense differs from one faith-tradition to another, it is clearly God’s business and not ours.³

But how can we best portray the role which other-believers play in helping us to articulate our faith-traditions, and how can it contribute to our subject of reconciliation? I shall argue that these two questions lead to a single answer: only by recognizing the role which other-believers play in enhancing and confirming our faith, whoever “we” might be, can we activate the powers latent within that faith for reconciling differences, precisely there where our standard responses to difference have proved so deadly. That has of course been in the domain of political life and interaction, where religious difference seems to exacerbate rather than temper animosity. Rather than simply remark that *corruptio optimi pessima est*, however, can we trace the reasons for that to our need to reduce religious heritage to our possession? What Karl Barth liked to call the devolution of *faith* into *religion*, yet while he would have wished to restrict the term “faith” to Christian revelation, we may well find similar correctives in each of the Abrahamic faiths. Correctives, that is, to the propensity of staunch believers to feel that they have grasped the import of their faith-tradition, and would certainly need no help from others especially “other-believers” to improve their grasp of their own faith.⁴

¹ This is the burden of Karl Rahner’s celebrated “world-church” lecture, published in *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) as “Towards a Fundamental Interpretation of Vatican II.”

² *Nostra Aetate*, par 3..

³ On his issue, see Augustine DiNoia, O.P. *Diversity of Religions* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), Gavin D’Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford, 1986), and Paul Griffiths: *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, MA / Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

⁴ What Paul Griffiths calls “the neuralgic point of creative conceptual growth for Christian thought” (*Problems*, 97). Why else would it prove ‘neuralgic’ except for this propensity?

Indeed, the philosophical dimension of my response will remind us how faith cannot be something which we grasp but which must grasp us, but let us first be reminded by the gospel.

Shortly after having reminded the disciples that they were ignorant of “what manner of spirit they were,” Luke tells us that Jesus “sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go,” admonishing them to “cure the sick who are there and say to them: ‘the kingdom of God has come near to you’” (10:9). Then when “the seventy disciples returned with joy, saying ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’” Luke relates a reflective turn on Jesus’ part quite uncharacteristic of the synoptics: “At that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will’” (10:21). Since we are clearly the “wise and intelligent,” I want to suggest that Jesus is identifying an epistemological failure we all share when it comes to appropriating a God-given revelation by faith. My guide to exposing this failure will be Aquinas, but my chosen commentator will be Oliver Sacks. What recommends the author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* for this task is not only his luminous prose, but his reflections (introducing Part One) on “deficiencies,” acutely displayed in the way in which he practices neurology.⁵ For neurologists, he reminds us, are preoccupied with *deficiencies*, often those induced by injury or trauma. Yet what came to fascinate Sacks were the ways those deficiencies opened his patients to modes of understanding unavailable to us who regard ourselves as whole and complete. This practitioner of neurology recovered the art of medicine at the precise point where he came to recognize the limits of his science. Or put more positively, his scientific acumen led him to a point where he could identify yet other powers of a human person shining through what were manifest deficiencies. And what should interest us is the way he allows himself to be carried beyond the limits of what he could claim to know, only to learn from these “deficient” persons something that they alone could teach him. What can such remarkable commentary on Jesus’ words of praise to his Father tell us about the inner structure of faith and its endemic need for “others” to illuminate its import for us believers?

Aquinas’ initial answer is simple and straightforward: in speaking of God (and the “things of God”) we can at best but “signify imperfectly.”⁶ His generous account suggests the “glass half-empty, half-full”

⁵ New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970; 1–5.

⁶ *Summa Theologiae* 1.13.5, with an illuminating Appendix to the Blackfriars’ edition by Herbert McCabe on “imperfect signification” (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965); see my “Maimonides, Aquinas and Ghazali on Naming God,” in Peter Ochs, ed., *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1993) 233–55.

dilemma. For it means, of course, that we will get it wrong much of the time, and especially so when we think we have it right! So we will ever be in need of correction when attempting to articulate the content of a purportedly divine revelation. That does not militate against what Robert Sokolowski identifies as the central task of theology: “working out terminal distinctions” to secure the grammar proper to discourse about God.⁷ But it may take generations to explore the import of those distinctions. Here lies the special role of interfaith encounter. As Jean Daniélou noted fifty years ago, the prevailing story of Christian missionary activity bringing Christ, say, to India failed to capture the effective drama of mission practice. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that we meet Christ there.⁸ The explanation is as simple as “reader-response” criticism: try to speak of Jesus to people formed as Hindus, and the questions they raise will force us to a new perspective on the life and mission of Jesus. What ensues is our discovering a fresh face of Jesus; or even better, another face of God reflected in Jesus. Indeed, such an encounter can open a new chapter in theology, as Sara Grant’s Teape lectures show so eloquently.⁹ By constructing a conversation between Aquinas and Shankara, she shows just how unique the relation between creation and its creator must be. Once we attend to the import of his formula for creation as “the emanation of the being entire from the universal cause of all being” (ST 1.45.1), we find that we cannot speak of creator and creation as two separate things. What Sokolowski calls “the distinction” of God from God’s creation is real enough, certainly, to block any naïve pantheistic images; yet we can hardly speak of two separate things, since the very being of creatures is a “being-to” God (ST 1.45.4). So the term adopted by Shankara and so redolent of Hindu thought, “non-duality”, turns out to render the elusive creator/creature distinction better than anything else. But it took a person whose study of Shankara’s thought had been augmented by years actively participating in an *ashram* in Pune in India to bring to light the treasure latent in the Christian doctrine of creation.

Read in conjunction with Rudi te Velde’s *Substantiality and Participation in Aquinas*, Sara Grant’s slim volume offers a contemporary perspective on Aquinas’ recourse to this instrument of Neoplatonic thought to render coherent the radical introduction of a free creator into Hellenic metaphysics.¹⁰ Yet that was only accomplished, in fact, in conjunction with Avicenna and Moses Maimonides: an

⁷ *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989); for an extended reflection on Wittgenstein’s aphorism, “theology as grammar,” see George Lindbeck: *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

⁸ Jean Daniélou *Salvation of the Nations*; translated by Angeline Bouchard (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

⁹ Sara Grant: *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Nondualist Christian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Islamic philosopher who introduced a distinction which would prove key to Aquinas' elaboration of the creator as "cause of being," and a Jewish thinker steeped in "the Islamicate."¹¹ So what many regard as the classical Christian synthesis of philosophical theology, Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, proves in retrospect to have already been an intercultural, interfaith achievement, offering a constructive intellectual demonstration how it is that faith cannot be something which we grasp but which must grasp us; and more positively, of the role those of other faiths can play in articulating one's own. What I want to show now are the ways in which our present generation is called to a fresh appreciation of the need to enrich our faith-perspective with that of others who believe quite differently than we do, as the only hope of reconciling those differences which a self-enclosed view of "religion" can so easily escalate into deadly conflict. What sets the stage for conflict will turn out, in fact, to be notions of the divinity with idolatrous consequences, opposing one another like tribal gods yet all the more deadly in that they presume to have total sway (or in the case of messianic Jewish groups like Gush Emunim, exclusive hegemony over a piece of land). This is hardly new, of course, since the Crusades might be considered a delayed western reaction to Islam's spectacular spread within a century of the death of the Prophet, while the later "mission civilizatrice" of colonialism represented a belated western recovery from the stalemate attendant upon Christian withdrawal from the Holy Land following the demise of the Crusades as well as the later defeat of Ottoman Muslim forces at Vienna in 1529. And the Zionist recovery of that same land fulfils the pattern as well, even though its origins were expressly secular, utopian and socialist, for the symbolic forces it unleashed have been transmuted into virulently religious forms of nationalism.

When religion can so easily mask and meretriciously legitimate forces intent on dominating land and especially natural resources crucial to the industrialized world like oil, what hope have we of turning those same religious traditions into forces for reconciliation? Very little, humanly speaking, and each of the Abrahamic faiths deploys its symbolic resources to help us understand that fact. What Christians call "original sin" Jews call *yetzer ra* [inclination to evil], and Muslims *jahiliyya* [state of ignorance]. In Islam, this description of Bedouin tribes in the Hejaz before the revelation of the Qur'an "came down" to Muhammad became normative for all human beings bereft of revelation, wandering aimlessly in the desert as they follow the whims of their own wayward desires. Indeed, that parable sounds familiar to Christians as Paul's reminder that "the

¹¹ See my *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); the term 'Islamicate' was coined by Marshall Hodgson to convey the extensive cultural milieu: *Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

good that we would do we don't do, and the evil that we would not do we do do;" indeed, nothing can save us from this "body of death" but "the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 7:18), reminding some of us of Chesterton's quip that original sin is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.¹² The inertial pull of *yetzer ra* in Jewish ethos can be detected in any conversation among them, particularly those intent on improving the current situation, whatever it may be. Yet the contrary path of Torah observance stands, as Muslims have the living presence of God's creating and healing Word in the Qur'an, and Christians "the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." So a grim diagnosis of the human condition is matched by a strong antidote for its crippling effects. But how effective have these antidotes been for as long as they have been present in the traditions taken separately? Francis of Assisi, whose very life reminded his century of the efficacy of that "grace of God in Christ Jesus," was said to have been as impressed with the faith of the Muslims whom he met at Damietta as he was depressed at the conduct of the crusading knights with whom he had been transported there. Yet it may be that the opening provided by *Nostra Aetate*, together with cultural changes in attitudes catalyzed by increased commingling of cultures, will bring people of faith into alliances which can foster mutual illumination and unveil other dimensions of these faith-traditions. In short, what each of us has failed to do separately we may now be given the opportunity to accomplish together.

What I would like to suggest is that the presence of other-believers can help faithful in each tradition to gain insight into the distortions of that tradition: the ways it has compromised with various seductions of state power, the ways in which fixation on a particular *other* may have skewed their understanding of the revelation given them. Sometimes minority voices within a tradition will make that clear, as Mennonites trace compromising elements in western Christianity to an early alliance with Constantine, while Sufi Muslims remind their Sunni and Shi'a companions in faith of the crippling effects of a soul-less *shari'a*, harkening to the way religious and secular leaders colluded in Baghdad in 922 to dispose of Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj: "his hands and his feet were cut off, he was hanged on the gallows, and then decapitated; his body was burned and its ashes cast into the Tigris."¹³ Yet the memory of his

¹² *Orthodoxy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996; original, 1908); excepting radical Calvinist views which have given the doctrine an unacceptable name.

¹³ Rabia Terri Harris, "Nonviolence in Islam: the Alternative Community Tradition," in Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, ed., *Subverting Hatred: the Challenge of Nonviolence in religious Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998) 95-114, at 101. See the four-volume study of Louis Massignon: *the Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, translated by Herbert Mason (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), and Herbert Mason's dramatic précis: *The Death of al-Hallaj* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

martyrdom continues to haunt the Islamic world as a poignant reminder of God's presence among us in holy men and women. In fact, this towering figure became the inner guide of Louis Massignon, the French Islamicist whose life spanned the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, guiding his return to his Catholicism in a way which allowed him to continue to be instructed by the vibrant faith of his Muslim friends.¹⁴ His friendship with Paul VI also allowed his voice to resonate in the way that *Nostra Aetate* directed Catholics to a fresh appreciation of Islam. Indeed, each of the twentieth century figures who stand out as spiritual leaders in their respective traditions reflects a creative interaction with another faith-tradition, from Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig in Judaism, to Louis Massignon, Jules Monchanin and Bede Griffiths among Catholic Christians, and in Islam, the Pathan leader and man of God, 'Abdul Ghaffar Kahn, who responded to the inspiration of Gandhi to form a hundred thousand Pathan nonviolent soldiers, to help bring independence to India. The fledgling state of Pakistan, led by mullahs and military men, could not countenance Badshah Kahn, however, so imprisoned him and brutally suppressed his army of Khudai Khidmatgars.¹⁵ Indeed, traditions usually find it easier to eject voices proposing renewal than accept their challenging invitation.

For in fact, each of our religious traditions displays a shadow-side (to borrow an illuminating expression from Jung's psychology) which can easily be manipulated by those intent to harness it to the service of power, and which impedes any self-corrective momentum in the tradition.¹⁶ These shadow sides have been reinforced whenever relations among the communities have been governed by polemics, notably the polemics of power. We have seen how centuries of trading the epithet of "infidel" prevented both Christians and Muslims from even thinking the other had anything to offer, while the genocide at Auschwitz culminated eighteen centuries of "teaching of contempt" (Jules Isaac) as ostensibly Christian societies kept Jews as the *other* in their midst, in a see-saw between begrudging toleration and outright persecution.¹⁷ Can it be any wonder that Ashkenazi Jews' relation to Christianity reflected a "know your enemy" scenario? Sephardic Jews, ensconced in the Islamicate, developed a very different set of attitudes, for while they shared a second-class (*dhimmi*) status with Christians, leaders like Moses Maimonides could flourish in his role as court physician to Salah ad-Din, while also serving his own

¹⁴ Mary Louise Gude, C.S.C., *Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Compassion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Rabia Terri Harris, note 12, 103; see Eknath Easwaran: *A Man to Match his Mountains: Badshah Khan, Nonviolent Soldier of Islam* (Petaluma, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1984).

¹⁶ See my review of two studies by Avital Wohlman: "A Philosophical Foray into Difference and dialogue: Avital Wohlman on Maimonides and Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002) 181–94.

¹⁷ Jules Isaac, *Has anti-Semitism Roots in Christianity?* (New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1961)

community in countless ways. (Indeed, articulate Sephardim can bemoan the way Zionism was fostered in the polemical soil of Ashkenazi Judaism, thereby shaping the prevailing attitudes in the subsequent state of Israel.¹⁸) As recent events have revealed a shadow-side of Islam, western societies have reacted so as to reveal their own, with predictable polemics. What is most significant about this phenomenon is the way it can turn religious traditions into collective idolatries, as they allow themselves to be so fixated on negative features of an opposing community as to block their own access to the revelation given them, with its power to transform hatred and fear. A contemporary Sufi writer has rendered the name 'Islam' as 'reconciliation with God', so highlighting that any tradition will need to become reconciled with its God concomitantly with reconciling to others, for the shadow side effectively obscures the revealing God from the community called to receive revelation in fruitfulness.¹⁹ The dialectic of love and rejection dear to the Hebrew prophets works itself out in each of the Abrahamic faiths.

The God shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims is the free creator of "heaven and earth," whom the Qur'an describes so simply as "the One who says 'be' and it is" (6:73). John Milbank remarks how startling is the biblical account of the origins of the universe in an "original peaceful creation." Yet he also reminds us how that text has become so "concealed . . . beneath the palimpsest of the negative distortion of *dominium*" that the church must continually "seek to recover [it] through the superimposition of a third redemptive template, which corrects these distortions by means of forgiveness and atonement."²⁰ For the "dominion" to which he alludes extends beyond nature to include other human beings as well, legitimizing force to subdue any recalcitrant group. Islam finds in that free creation the source empowering efforts to restore that original harmony to the world in which we live, while simply presuming that the struggle necessary to move us from this world [*al-dunyā*] to the next [*al-ākhirā*] will inevitably entail using force not to coerce hearts ("there is no compulsion in religion" [2:256]) but to establish "the *political domain* of Islam, so that Islam can work to produce the order on earth that the Qur'an seeks."²¹ So this struggle [*jihād*] will involve "striving with your wealth and your lives in the path of God" (9:41). Yet the tradition distinguishes sharply between *lesser* and

¹⁸ See David Sasha in *Sephardic Heritage Update* (8 October 2002), available from slipstein@aol.com.

¹⁹ For the relations among Revealer, revealing Word, and receiving community, my suggestion of the triadic structure of Abrahamic faiths in *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

²⁰ *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 317.

²¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis/Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980) 63.

greater jihād, with the “lesser” identified with overt force and the “greater” with the struggle to align one’s own heart with the “path of God.” Yet the order, the world for which one is striving, will not be realized until the final judgment, so Fazlur Rahman reasons that our current “vision must see through the consequences of [our] actions and aims [to] the end which constitutes the meaning of positive human effort. This is the end which cannot be achieved without *jihād*, for it is God’s unalterable law that He will not bring about results without human endeavour; otherwise those who endeavour and those who do not would become indistinguishable” (64).

So the beginning and the end are intimately connected for the Qur’an: the same One “who says ‘be’ and it is” will restore our bodily selves to life for a judgment which will ask how well each of us has sought to return everything to the One from whom we receive everything. For that “return” delineates the “path of God” to which all human beings are called, according to their proper revelation, since without revelation they could not hope to find it. Following it will require constant effort [*jihād*], but the power to persevere stems from that same source. Fail we shall, but the One in whose name we initiate every action is above all merciful [*b’ism Allah ar-Rahman ar-Rahīm*], with a mercy which empowers each fresh start. So the abiding presence of this call to greater *jihād* shows why the Sufi author, Rabia Terri Harris, insists that “‘Islam’ “essentially conveys reconciliation with God,” for each of us will always stand in need of that; which also explains why the greater *jihād* must always accompany the lesser, lest we too readily identify our wayward goals with “struggle in the path of God.” So any effort to restore the original peace of creation, whether by Muslims or Christians, will entail overcoming the ways by which each tradition has also left room for our own desires to distort the community’s aspirations, so warranting the use of force ostensibly “in the way of God” yet along paths we outline ourselves. And since each one of our Abrahamic communities has shown itself less than exemplary in that task, we may find our best resources lie in learning from each other’s relative successes or failures.

Forgiveness and atonement do not play the same role in Islam as they do in Christian doctrine and commended practice. The gracious mercy of God, exhibited in the gift of the Qur’an, can only remind us of the complete freedom of creation, the original grace. But something else is operative, something parallel to the African *ubuntu* philosophy, wherein human beings are invited to see themselves in relation to the others facing them: “I am because you are.” From all indications, the power and momentum of the Peace and Reconciliation Commission in South African society stem from this ancestral conviction of solidarity. One might even ask whether the touted sense of “individual responsibility” which western Christians celebrate as an achievement would

not, bereft of its religious roots, actually impede such a process in our societies, were we to have the courage to undertake it! Yet Islamic societies continue to display an active sense of hospitality: the very presence of a stranger elicits a welcoming response from them. It is difficult to try to identify that response. It need not be one of overt assistance; it appears to be an anticipation that your presence represents something offered to me, perhaps an offering of myself to me: in reaching out to you I anticipate that something will be awakened in me. Yet the promise of that awakening is not what moves me to respond to your presence; that would be too calculating. It is rather that your presence activates a profound sense of our being on this journey together. It is not immediately evident how Islam engenders this spirit, but it may have something to do with the call of the Qur'an, the way it calls forth a response from the listener. And since that response takes place in a communal setting, we are then linked together as responders to the creating Word of God, and so begin actively to participate in what is generated in the synergy between call and response. This represents a "relational ontology" in practice, a living out of the fact that our very existence is (as Aquinas noted) an "existence-to" our creator, for it is continually coming *from* that One. This abiding sense of creation is a palpable reality in Islam, where any sort of future plans are inevitably tempered with "*in sh'Allah!*" So the Islamic path of reconciliation becomes receiving one another under the canopy of God's prevailing mercy, to which all practicing Muslims feel themselves beholden. It is less a matter of making specific amends for personal injury than it is a mutual recognition that we are walking a path together, along which we all stumble, so that we are each empowered to welcome the other back, even when that means stepping across a divide exacerbated by personal injury.

This mercy-centred reception of others translates personally into a keen feeling for friendship as well as its exigent practice. It is perhaps here that other-believers feel most welcomed, for personal friendships inevitably result in their being received into the bosom of the community, less as *other*-believers than as *believers*. This sentiment clearly animated Louis Massignon's life-long study of Islam, as he was drawn into one friendship after another with Muslims educated or uneducated, each of whom apparently nourished his own faith in God. In the event, these continuing friendships effected an acute sense of solidarity with the Algerian independence movement, in the face of repression by his own country's military, which he actively protested on the streets of Paris in his late seventies.²² Indeed, the figure of Massignon may be said to shape our attempt to gain an interfaith perspective on reconciliation. For it was his founding friendship with al-Hallaj, given expression in his countless Muslim

²² Mary Louise Gude, C.S.C., *Louis Massignon*... (note 14) 214ff.

friends, that allowed him to recover his own faith and live it subsequently in the unique way he did: as one whose Christian faith was suffused with what he continued to learn from his Muslim friends. I have tried to characterize this dialectic of faith as “inter-faith” by reminding us of the peculiar “shadow-side” associated with each of the Abrahamic faiths. What interfaith friendships seem to offer is a way of allowing the faith of others, with the access to the divine that represents, to interact with our own faith commitment to draw attention to dimensions of our faith response which can effectively be blocked by the shadow-side of our tradition. This is far from a simple “complementarity” approach, wherein one tradition makes up what is lacking in the other. It rather represents a process whereby triangulating from another tradition not abstractly but through friendships allows us to activate the critical dimensions of our own tradition, so clarifying what may have become obscured in the revelation we have received. It is my contention that our generation comes along at a prescient time for effecting a mutual illumination of this sort, exemplified in the life of Louis Massignon. How it can also prove possible with the third and originating Abrahamic partner will be explored in subsequent reflections on way the Holy Land offers a case study in reconciliation; indeed, more taxing than one could ever imagine.

What we dearly need at this point, however, is a ritual way of expressing that “triangulation through friendship.” Steps have been taken by couples facing the prospect of interfaith marriages, notably where the faith of each partner is so dear that they sense how fidelity to their respective faiths will prove crucial to their mutual fidelity over a lifetime. Yet even in relationships of far less intimacy, and especially for those who are striving together towards a shared goal, joint ways of prayer will prove crucial. Ronald Wells tells a story of a eucharistic service intended to reinforce faltering efforts to bridge the acrimonious religious divide during the torturous peacemaking in northern Ireland, in the face of ecclesiastical rules preventing those who wanted to express their shared hope for reconciliation from full participation.²³ At one of these an older Catholic woman took the communion wafer in her own hands to her Protestant counterpart, offering half of it to him with the words: “The body of Christ broken for us.” Let us attend to the total symbolism here, for if age bears the fruit of a wisdom born of suffering, being a woman allowed her to bridge the ecclesiastical divide. Indeed, women may best serve to foster reconciliation between forces now dividing our world into Christian and Muslim, much as women’s groups helped to defuse

²³ I am indebted to Dan Philpott for showing me the essay by Ronald Wells: “Northern Ireland: A Study of Friendship, Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” which will appear in his edited book:

the conflict between Christian societies in Ireland. Moreover, the need for ritual expression reminds us forcibly of Jesus' distillation of the multiple commandments of the Torah to two: reconciliation with God will only be effected as we reconcile with one another, and rituals can best express that intertwining.