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# French Catholics in the Mediterranean ambit: From the Libération to the Algerian war

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**French Catholics in the Mediterranean ambit:**

**From the Liberation to the Algerian war**

In 1945, there were hundreds of thousands of French people settled Southern and Eastern reaches of the Mediterranean. Europe's colonial expansion had set their country in competition with the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Italy. These French people upheld discriminatory relationships with the colonised populations<sup>1</sup> and would for a few years enjoy specific rights in the countries obtaining their independence. Mostly Catholic, they lived among predominantly Muslim societies, excepted in Lebanon. In the Maghreb, parish governance was in the hands of an exclusively European diocesan clergy; however, from Egypt to Syria it also involved native, mostly Maronite, Melchite or Coptic Catholic priests. As of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the religious orders' male and female communities had been setting up their education or health care networks.

This situation was shaken up by the French defeat of 1940. The involvement of colonial troops in the liberation of France, the principles advocated by the United Nation Charter (1945) and those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) fostered a collective awareness of a world in the process of overtaking another. In 1952 the mayor of Florence, Giorgio La Pira (1904-1977), organised the first "Conference on Peace and Christian Civilization" at the end of the decade, he titled these encounters "Mediterranean Conferences"

This study proposes to define the involvement of French Catholics under the pontificate of Pius 12<sup>th</sup> (r. 1939-1958), with a focus on their discourse on Islam and Muslims within the Mediterranean realm. In a demographic context in which Muslim growth was superior to the average global increase, some rejected political change or sought to delay it

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<sup>1</sup>R. CAUCANAS, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Méditerranée. Ombres et lumières de l'entre-deux-guerres (1919-1939)*, preface by J.M.Aveline, Marseille, Publications Chemins de Dialogue, 2017, p. 77-85.

as much as possible, as was indeed the case within the settler colony of Algeria. Conversely, others were busy preparing the transformation of inter-religious relations through intellectual and pastoral work. Some even took part in the construction of the independent states.

### **1. Being a French Catholic under the pontificate of Pius 12<sup>th</sup>**

Half way through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France numbered some 43 million people. 90% of them had been baptised in the catholic Church but this ratio conceals significant regional and social differences. Religious sociology studies had been initiated in 1931 by jurist Gabriel Le Bras (1891-1970) with whom Canon Fernand Boulard (1898-1977) joined forces. Criteria mostly bore on weekly Sunday worship attendance and Easter duty observance. The religious map of France they produced makes it plain to see that in the North Mediterranean sector (the French Mediterranean coast) religious practice is below average whereas, from the Basque Country to the Alps a fragmented arc displays higher practice ratios. In the cities working class practice ratios are lower than those for higher social classes.<sup>2</sup> Estimations of the number of French Catholics in other Mediterranean countries are as follows: 900000 in Algeria who live their Christian faith in varied ways,<sup>3</sup> 325000 in Morocco,<sup>4</sup> 150000 in Tunisia<sup>5</sup> and some tens of thousands in Egypt. However, the failure of the Suez military expedition planned in secrecy between London Paris and Tel-Aviv, sped up the waning of a European presence on the Nile's banks.

In 1948, France numbered 42500 secular priests, a figure that would remain stable before its dwindling began by the end of the decade. The vibrant hubs of the Mission de France and Mission ouvrière were jolted in their re-evangelising drive by the worker priests crisis of 1954. The monastic orders, enclosed, working, or mendicant, variously instituted religious congregations, societies of apostolic life and secular institutes counted tens of

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<sup>2</sup> G. CHOLVY-Y.M HILAIRE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, Bibliothèque historique Privat, Toulouse, 1988, pp. 174-175.

<sup>3</sup> S. OISSILA, *L'Algérie catholique XIX<sup>e</sup> - XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, CNRS Editions, Paris, pp. 87-149.

<sup>4</sup> S. DELAVELLE, *Franciscains au Maroc. Huit siècles de rencontres*, Chemins de Dialogue, Marseille, 2019, p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> M. SEKLANI, *La population de la Tunisie*, Tunis, CICRED, <http://www.cicred.org/Eng/Publications/pdf/c-c51.pdf>

communities gathering thousands of Catholics who had taken vows. They carried out their vocation in France or abroad, notably in the Mediterranean realm.<sup>6</sup>

After the war, the Catholic Church rationalised the structure of its network of schools and health care services.<sup>7</sup> The confessional education sector numbered 50000 teachers who were in their vast majority priests or male or female religious.<sup>8</sup> The *Loi Baranger* made state support available to them and fostered a years-long debate. The law passed on 31 December 1959 allowed an important part of this network to enjoy the state's conditional support depending on the institution's statute.<sup>9</sup> Alongside its setup of laic (secular) establishment known as the *Alliance française*,<sup>10</sup> the state continued to provide financial support to confessional institutions considered as complementary instruments serving France's cultural expansion.<sup>11</sup> Among the most famous institutions, the Jesuit Collège de la Sainte-Famille in Cairo, and the Salesian brothers' Collège Saint-Marc in Alexandria.

In the wake of the Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul, many professional organisations, care and relief charities testify to Catholic involvement in diverse social settings.<sup>12</sup> Launched in 1904 the *Semaines sociales* are a travelling university which runs yearly sessions seeking to help think concrete formulae towards the implementation of the Church's social doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Under the pontificate of Pius 12<sup>th</sup> were created Caritas Internationalis,<sup>14</sup> whose French branch, *Secours catholique* was founded by Abbé Jean Rodhain (1900-1977) and Jesuit Roger Braun (1910-1981), the *Association des Paralysés de France* by André Trannoy

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<sup>6</sup> P. Cabanel-J.D. Durand, dir. *Le grand exil des congrégations religieuses françaises 1901-1914*, Cerf, Paris, 2005, pp. 307-414.

<sup>7</sup> « L'enseignement privé en France au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle », B. Poucet, in *Carrefours de l'Éducation*, XIII, 2002, pp. 152-171.

<sup>8</sup> J. Lalouette *L'évolution de l'école catholique en France après la loi Debré et la déclaration Gravissimum educationis momentum*, in «L'État et l'enseignement privé. L'application de la loi Debré» dir. B. Poucet, PUR, Rennes, 1959, pp. 87-104.

<sup>9</sup> *Loi n°59-1557 du 31 décembre 1959*

<sup>10</sup> M. Roselli *Le projet politique de la langue française. Le rôle de l'Alliance française*, « Politix. Revue des sciences sociales du politique », XXXVI, 1996, p. 73-94.

<sup>11</sup> J. Bocquet, dir. *L'Enseignement français en Méditerranée. Les missionnaires et l'Alliance israélite universelle*, PUR, Rennes, 2010, pp. 13-28.

<sup>12</sup> C. Mercier *Les fondations de la Communauté de Sant'Egidio et de la Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul. Essai de mise en parallèle* in «Archives de sciences sociales des religions», CXLIX janvier-mars 2010. Available on line 13 December 2010, consulted 20 May 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/22009>

<sup>13</sup> P. Droulers *L'action populaire et les Semaines sociales de France, 1919-1939* in «Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France», CLXXIX, 1981, pp. 227-252.

<sup>14</sup>F. Lunel *Roger Braun s.j. 1910-1981. Engagement philosémite et secours aux étrangers* «Thesis defended at the Université du Maine», December 2013, dir. D. Avon p. 117 ss.

(1907-1994), the association Emmaus by abbé Pierre (1912-2007),<sup>15</sup> et ATD [« Aide à toute détresse »] Fourth World<sup>16</sup> by Father Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988). Particular attention was dedicated to young people's free time. A 19<sup>th</sup> century legacy, the patronages (Catholic youth clubs) got a fresh lease of life as Cœurs Vaillants.<sup>17</sup> As from the twenties they were overtaken by diversified Catholic action movements and by Scouts organisations. While there was little scope for a Catholic Young Farmers' model south of the Mediterranean,<sup>18</sup> the Scout formula spread more readily from Lebanon to Morocco. However, in the late fifties both experienced crises brought about by internal tensions and decolonisation-driven political issues.

The Catholic intelligentsia had a voice in public debate as evidenced by the creation of the Centre catholique des intellectuels français (CCIF) in 1945 or the standing of the revue *Esprit* even after the death of Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), whose philosophy resonated as far as Morocco, Egypt and Lebanon.<sup>19</sup> The confessional press showed rude health and the works published by Catholic publishers were distributed in the Mediterranean realm. Georges Bernanos (1888-1948), at war with his Marxist-leaning coreligionists, yielded an ultimate posthumous novel the *Dialogue des Carmélites* (1949). In his *Mémoires improvisées* (1955), Paul Claudel (1868-1955) relates the journey of a poet inspired by his reading of the Bible and proves a fierce champion of the State of Israel. François Mauriac (1885-1970), Nobel price of literature in 1952, sided with orientalist Louis Massignon<sup>20</sup> (1884-1962 in his opposition to French politics in Morocco concerning the temporary deposition and exile of Sultan Mohamed Bin Yusef (1909-1961). The work of Julien Green (1900-1998) is pervaded by the tension between his Catholic faith and the question of good and evil driven by his undivulged homosexuality. Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) sought to set forth a “Christian existentialism”. Within the crucible of Thomas Aquinas' heirs, philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) set about to “teach the supernatural truth” to the sons of Israel while also combatting antisemitism,<sup>21</sup> beyond his residency at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval

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<sup>15</sup> A. Brodiez *Circulations et recompositions des espaces du politique dans les ONG : le cas d'Emmaüs* in «Politique et Sociétés», XXVIII, 2009, pp.99-109

<sup>16</sup> F. VIGUIER, *La cause des pauvres en France*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2020, p. 113-141.

<sup>17</sup> G. CHOLVY, *Histoire des organisations et mouvements chrétiens de jeunesse en France (XIX<sup>e</sup> - XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Cerf, Paris, 1999, pp. 317-326.

<sup>18</sup> Diaire G.C. Anawati, September 1944-1945, 18 may 1945, in *Archives IDEO*, «Anawati».

<sup>19</sup> A. ELIAS, *Le Cénacle libanais (1946-1984). Une tribune pour une science du Liban*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1999, pp. 317-326.

<sup>20</sup> C. DESTREMAU-J. MONCELON, *Massignon*, Plon, Paris, 1996, pp. 334-350.

<sup>21</sup> M. FOURCADE, *Feu la modernité ? Maritain et les maritainismes, t. 3 Ceux qui voulaient sauver leur temps (1933-1939)*, Editions Arbre bleu, Nancy, 2021, pp. 1090-1147.

Studies in Toronto,<sup>22</sup> medievalist Étienne Gilson (1884-1978), would keep up his connection with his spiritual brethren, Olivier Lacombe (1904-2001) headed for India, Dominican Jean de Menasce (1902-1973) turned his attention to Iran's pre-Islamic religions and Frère Marie-André,<sup>23</sup> become orientalist Louis Gardet (1904-1986), specialised in Muslim mysticism and philosophy.

French Catholic opinion was far from uniform, every facet of the political spectrum, from *La Cité catholique* to *La Quinzaine* got an airing. But in Rome persisted a mindset of sombre distrust the *furia francese*,<sup>24</sup> so much so that admonitions were deemed imperative. They primarily concerned churchmen, although Jacques Maritain himself was summonsed. Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990), whose essay 1942, *Une école de théologie, le Saulchoir* (1937), was placed on the Vatican's Index of Forbidden Books in 1942, had focussed his work on the link between spirituality and the theology of work and after the promulgation of the encyclical *Humani generis* (1950), several Jesuits from the “école de Fourvière” were disciplined in measures that targeted the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955).

## 2. The settings of meetings between Catholics and Muslims

South of the Mediterranean, the clergy worked essentially among the Catholic populations hailing from Europe. A minority took an interest in the Muslims but, over the decades, this relation was mostly envisaged from the angle of ministry via Francisation. The legacy of Charles Lavigerie (1825-1882) yielded two conflicting trends within the Society of the White Fathers: in Rome, Roberto Focà (1887-1973) upheld the necessity of conversion; during the war he motivated a group of men dedicated to proselytizing activities. In Tunis André Demeerseman (1901-1993) founded in 1926 the Institut des Belles Lettres arabes (IBLA) and its eponymous revue, intended to further both Christians and Muslims' knowledge of each other,<sup>25</sup> with the participation of Zitouna ulama and Manouba scholars. In

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<sup>22</sup> F. MICHEL, *Étienne Gilson. Une biographie intellectuelle et politique*, Vrin, Paris, 2018, p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> E. BORRMANS, *Louis Gardet (1904-1986), philosophe chrétien des cultures et témoin du dialogue islamo-chrétien*, Cerf, Paris, pp. 25-35.

<sup>24</sup> E. FOUILLOUX, *Une Église en quête de liberté. La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II 1914-1962*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1998, pp. 248-252.

<sup>25</sup> A. DEMEERSEMAN, *La famille tunisienne et les temps nouveaux*, preface by J. Berque, Maison tunisienne de l'Édition, Tunis, 1967.

Algiers, qualifying the prior Roman line of thought, Henri Marchal (1875-1957, author of *Grandes lignes de l'apostolat des pères blancs* (1938), advised against the open criticism of Islam or a systematic drive for baptism.

In the late thirties, other factors of change were afoot. In his 15 August 1937 letter, Superior General Wladimir Ledochowski (1866-1942) kickstarted the *missio islamica*,<sup>26</sup> a project entrusted— among others – to Christophe de Bonneville (1888-1947) who would encourage the launch of the review *En terre d'Islam*. Those Jesuits had acquired the conviction that Islam is not a monolithic bloc, unchanging from the Atlantic to India. They undertook<sup>27</sup> academic research at Beirut's Institut d'études orientales, and admitted Catholics wishing to study Arabic in their house at Bickfaya.<sup>28</sup> From the bosom of the Preachers' family, Chenu set his sights on an Egyptian who had passed from the Greek Orthodox to the Greek Catholic faith: Georges Chehata Anawati (1905-1994). He entrusted him with the mission to lead an ongoing ministry training course based on an in-depth knowledge of the Islamic heritage and the knowledge of Muslim theology. In parallel, Jean de Menasce (1902-1973), a Jewish convert to Catholicism, invited his Dominican brethren to uphold the tradition of a “theological” ministry towards the “heretics”, Jews and Muslims, keeping in mind that the souls they attended to held part of the “truth”. Finally, the followers of Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916), the Little Brothers of Jesus, established at el-Abiodh since 1933 under the direction of René Voillaume (1905-2003), advocated the independence from all political power: “It behoves to the missionary, while keeping untouched the Church's deposit of faith (its already integrated Greek-Latin basis included) to become a true race brother, blood brother – in the blood of Christ – to the peoples to whom Jesus is sending him.”<sup>29</sup>

Spending time in diverse Maghreb Catholic institutions in 1942, Anawati entertained the project of an apostolic cum intellectual cooperation, assembling what he called a “Catholic ‘front’” whose tasks would be allocated according to each family's charism. As he saw it, Tunis' White Fathers could take on a “first preparation”: an introduction to all “things Arab”, the language and “ministry technicalities”. In this perspective he conceived of the

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<sup>26</sup> O. SAAÏDIA, *Clercs catholiques et oulémas sunnites dans la première moitié du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle. Discours croisés*, Geuthner, Paris, 2004, pp. 248-264.

<sup>27</sup> C. VERDEIL, *La Mission jésuite du Mont-Liban et de Syrie (1830-1864)*, Les Indes savantes, Paris, 2011,

<sup>28</sup> A. D'ALVERNY, *Cours de langue arabe. Vocabulaire commenté et sur textes* Dar el-Machreq., Beirut, 1999<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> BR.ANDRÉ/L.GARDET, *L'Église et les cultures* (1936). in R.Voillaume, “El-Abiodh-Sidi-Cheikh (Histoire des origines de la Fraternité des Petits Frères de Jésus), Tre Fontane, Rome, VII/I, 1982, pp. 237-239.

Dominicans as dedicating themselves to “*higher* specialisation” in philosophy, theology and mysticism. The Preachers had opened a house in Cairo in 1928 but for want of means, the initial project for a vast foundation never housed more than three Dominicans who couldn’t agree on their projects and whose only Arabic speaker, Antonin Jausen (1871-1962), had taken refuge in Alexandria. Under the aegis of Marie-Dominique Boulanger (1885-1961), their pastoral work engaged a Thomist circle open to a small French-speaking Lasallian-educated elite.

Back in Cairo in 1945, Anawati implemented part of his project. He welcomed Jacques Jomier (1914-2008) and Serge de Beurecueil (1917-2005), soon joined by Dominique Boilot (1912-1989). He attended to the development of the library stock and created a modest “Arabic section”, prerequisite to the “indirect penetration of educated Arab society” in a country where, he summed up, before the eighteen million Muslims, stood only one million Christians among whom no more than 250000 Catholics (including 60000 Copts). The conception he had of the role of the Order in Egypt thus came down to three points: research work justifying a presence in the corridors of power; ministry to the Christian population; contacts with the Muslims with whom exchanges should be frank, open to a possible conversion though excluding it as a systematic prospect. Upon his canonical visit in March 1953, Prior Provincial Albert-Marie Avril (1897-1978) officially dedicated the House to Arab and Islamic studies thus founding the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies (IDEO).

Appointed Superior of the House, Boilot kept his team on the narrow path between scholarly withdrawal and socio-cultural dispersal. He was a member of the *Badaliya* prayer movement created by Louis Massignon et Mary Kahil (1889-1979) in Damietta, in 1934,<sup>30</sup> blessed by Pie 11<sup>th</sup> (r. 1922-1939). Its statutes had been approved early in the year 1947 by Mgr Pierre Kamel Medawar (1887-1985), Melchite bishop of Cairo: “in order to realise and accomplish, in its full providential truth, the vocation of Eastern Christians, be they Arab born or Arab speaking, reduced though they were to such a ‘small flock’ by the Muslim conquest”, now was the time to bring together “weak and poor souls who seek to love God and have him glorified more and more in Islam”. This *Badaliya* would yield Dar as-Salam, an

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<sup>30</sup> J. KERYELL, *Mary Kahil. Une grande dame d’Égypte 1889-1979*, Geuthner, Paris, 2010, pp. 44-50.



Egyptian cultural centre spearheaded by Mary Kahil.<sup>31</sup> Rome affiliated churches active in the Arab realm explored diverse pathways towards securing a presence they were often begrudged. The summer of 1953 saw another original Dominican initiative in the foundation by Bruno Hussar (1911-1996), of the St. Isaiah House, and of the Centre for the Study of Judaism in Jerusalem and later of the village of Neve Shalom where Jews and Palestinian Arabs live together.<sup>32</sup> But, as a result of the state of war between Israel and its neighbouring states no relations could be set up with the IDEO.

Morocco also yielded original foundations. The Franciscans opened the Centre de la Source, in Rabat. The Poor Clares had a nunnery called “Le Bocage” at Souissi near Rabat. Its Mother Superior, Mother Véronique Blanchet, was a disciple of Abbé Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) who sought to renew the way to be a Christian alongside Hindus and Jews.<sup>33</sup> The Benedictines had, for their part founded a monastery deep in the Middle Atlas; this was a novel monastic experiment bound in Charles de Foucauld’s spiritual legacy via Father Albert Peyriguère<sup>34</sup> (1883-1959). In October 1952 under the leadership of Dom Denis Martin, himself a disciple of Charles de Foucauld, some fifteen monks left EnCalcat to settle in the small hamlet of Toumliline “they had come to unite with the Christians living in the country, to bear with Christ the weight of Muslim salvation.”<sup>35</sup> They were very well received. The monastery set up an clinic and a guest house. To eschew the risk of intellectual depletion the prior sent some monks on higher education courses in France and brought in lay and clergy speakers to lecture the community, among them the Dominican Dominique Dubarle (1907-1987), Jesuit Stanislas Lyonnet (1902-1986), Abbé Charles Journet (1891-1975) and historian Henri-Irénée Marrou (1904-1977).

In March 1956, Morocco’s independence led to re-thinking the place’s purpose. In the course of the following months, Pope Pius 12<sup>th</sup> received the visit of Moulay Hassan (1929-1999). He welcomed him in the name of rapprochement between believers: “In the face of materialism’s noxious precepts which threaten civilisation, we wish to establish bridges, unite

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<sup>31</sup> D. AVON, *Les Frères prêcheurs en Orient (années 1910-années 1960)*, Cerf, Paris, 2005, pp. 559-568.

<sup>32</sup> B. Hussar, *Quand la nuée se levait... témoignage d’un prêtre israélien*, Cerf, Paris, 1983

<sup>33</sup> F. JACQUIN, *Jules Monchanin, prêtre, 1895-1957*, Cerf, Paris, 1996.

<sup>34</sup> *L’Islam et nous. Une interview de Youakim Moubarac recueillie par Pierre Briac* in «France catholique», 26.11.1971, p. 10. See also Moubarac’s publication of Peyriguère in *Informations catholiques internationales* 15.09.1959, p. 32

<sup>35</sup> Archives IDEO, « Anawati », cit., 21 February 1956.

the Muslim and Christian worlds.”<sup>36</sup> Two activities overlapped: one, public consisted in a meeting of minds in a framework of mutual respect. These encounters were publicised as “International Summer School” under the direction of Mgr Louis-Amédée Lefèvre (1890-1968), apostolic Vicar then Archbishop of Rabat, who had, as early as 1923, denounced colonial violence, and with the full support of Sultan Mohammed 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>37</sup> Topics covered, the town (1956), education (1957), local administration (1958), development (1959), the “mobilisation of human energies in keeping with modern local communities” (1960). The sessions were open to students of all countries, regardless of faith. There were over one hundred of them the first year and personalities of diverse backgrounds met; for instance, the leader of Istiqlâl’s Mohamed el-Fassi (1908-1991), the Personalist philosopher Mohamed Aziz Lahbabi ((1922-1993), the painter Jilali Gharbaoui (1930-1971), the Indian-born Islamic scholar Mohammed Hamidullah (1908-2002) who lived in France, the Jesuit Jean Daniélou (1905-1974), Maronite Abbé Youakim Moubarak (1924-1995), the sociologist Germaine Tillion (1907-2008), and the American Islamologist James Kritzeck (n. 1930).

Fathers Pie Aymard, Denis Martin et Placide Pernot organised, alongside these sessions, others, either of apostolic or Islamic studies, exclusively directed at Catholics. The Thomist group was key to this activity with regular input from Anawati, Journet, Gardet, Lacombe, Menasce.<sup>38</sup> Among the more occasional guest speakers figured the Jesuit Joseph Franklin Ewing (1905-1968), professor of anthropology and director of the Institute of Missiology at Fordham University (NY), Dom Paul Gordan (1912-1999), a Benedictine monk from Beuron archabbey director of the revue *Benediktinische Monatschrift*, Charles Van der Stratten-Waillet, the prior of Kansénia in the Belgian Congo. Their shared thinking addressed the problematics of Marxist atheism, racism, Islam’s growth and the dialogue between Christians and Muslims. According to Pierre Rondot (1904-2000), director of the Centre for Higher Administrative Studies in Modern Africa and Asia (C.H.E.A.M.) in an address to the French Dominicans at the Sauchoir in 1959, the Toumliline encounters showed that such “dialogue” was possible on specific subjects and with handpicked partners.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> P. de Ruffray *Toumliline*, in «Ecclesia», November 1961, p. 97

<sup>37</sup> Including such patrons as Moulay Hassan, the Crown Prince, André-Louis Dubois, haut-commissaire de France au Maroc, Mohammed el-Fassi, Robert Schuman, and chief Rabbi Danan.

<sup>38</sup> L. GARDET letter to Fr. Anawati, Toulouse, 22 June 1959 in «Archives IDEO, Anawati » Cit..

<sup>39</sup> *Ut Sint Unum*, March 1959, LXXI, p. 5.

Tensions remained between exchanging on shared issues and the necessity to bear Christian witness<sup>40</sup> among the Muslims in a society whose religious plurality was fast dwindling.

### 3. Catholic publications in French and Muslim reception

Among Catholics, the Orientalist Louis Massignon is the ultimate authority on all Islam-related matters. His lectures at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études and the Collège de France, his publications, his presence at the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, his contacts in the French diplomatic corps, his network of friendship and his correspondence with both Christians and Muslims, his public action, for instance within the *Comité d'entente France-Islam*, make him a key, though problematic, figure. More critical than most behind closed doors, is Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1884-1972). Having studied at Jerusalem's École biblique in 1909, Tisserant returned to the Middle East in 1923-24 in search of rare manuscripts<sup>41</sup> then undertook a pontifical mission in Ethiopia. Pro-Prefect of the Vatican Library from 1930 onwards, he had privileged relationship with Pius 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>42</sup> He was raised to the cardinalate in June 1936 and appointed secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches. According to him Islam is dangerous on two scores: it echoes the Arian heresy and it shows totalitarian tendencies.<sup>43</sup> With a view better to coordinate the action of diverse Catholic organisations in predominantly Muslim societies, he had sought the support of Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi (1872-1960), Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and got in touch with the commission directed by Albert Perbal (1884-1971), who had, during the war, sought to take stock of Catholic activity in the Land of Islam.

The Catholic French publications about Islam and the Muslims bear the mark of this polarity. In continuation to Massignon's work, but in search of a middle-road, the Dominican Anawati and Brother André, aka Louis Gardet, conducted a far-reaching comparatist work on

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<sup>40</sup> C. Journet, Preface in E. des ALLUES, *À la recherche de Dieu. Au service de l'Afrique*, Cerf, Paris, 1961, p. 6 ss.

<sup>41</sup> E. FOUILLOUX, *Les catholiques et l'unité chrétienne du xix<sup>e</sup> siècle au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle. Itinéraires européens d'expression française*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1982, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> E. Hamby, *Pie XI et Eugène Tisserant* in «Achille Ratti-Pape Pie XI», Collection de l'École française de Rome, CCXXIII, Rome, 1996, p. 215-222.

<sup>43</sup> D. Avon, *Un homme du magistère catholique devant l'islam : le cardinal Tisserant (1884-1972)* in «Ecrire l'histoire du christianisme contemporain. Autour de l'œuvre d'Étienne Fouilloux» dir. A Becker-F. Gugelot-D. Pelletier-N. Viet-Depaule, Karthala, Paris, 2013, pp. 143-159.

theology, mysticism and socio-cultural issues. Co-signed by both, the *Introduction à la théologie musulmane* (1948), is an innovative synthetic essay which gave them access to the realm of Islam specialists. Barring the significant reservations concerning Thomist presumptions as well as an excessive emphasis on Hanbali Islam asserted by the Franciscan Jean-Mohammed Abd el-Jalil (1904-1979), a Moroccan Muslim converted to Catholicism, their book was broadly approved by both Catholic and Muslim readerships. In *Mağallat al-Azhar* [the al-Azhar Revue], Shaykh Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā (1899-1963) saw in it a study of Islam “according to a truly scientific method” likely to lead to inter-religious collaborations “towards fighting atheism and atheists”.<sup>44</sup> Two decades later, the Lazarist Farid Jabre (1921-1993) and Shaykh Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ (1926-1986) would actually publish its translation into Arabic.

The cross-Mediterranean academic collaborations and rapprochements initiated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century endured into the 1940s and 1950s with Egypt setting the trend for the whole Arab world. Professor Amīn al-Ḥūlī (1885-1966), the exegesis chairholder at Fouad University and one of the Arabic translators of the Encyclopaedia of Islam (EI), averred that the Muslims could no longer stick to a frozen discourse to address the challenges presented by the Orientalists’ conclusions. In a book published in Cairo in 1944, he called for the publication of the already extant Arabic translation of *Geschichte des Qorans* by Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) and Friedrich Schwally (1863-1919).<sup>45</sup> He advocated a philological approach to the Qur’ran and sociological studies of the society in which it had been framed. The Secretariat General of the League of Arab States founded in 1945 set up its cultural division under the leadership of Aḥmad Amīn (1886-1954), the author of tens of books among which a multi-volumes history of Islamic culture. He coordinated his members’ endeavour by promoting the creation of an institute of Arab manuscripts (April 1946) directed by Syrien Yūsuf al-‘Iṣṣ (1916-1967, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Damascus and later director of the Institut des Hautes études arabologiques.<sup>46</sup> Appointed Minister of Education in 1950, the writer and essayist Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973) presided over the reunion of over fifty Arab and European specialists of the Middle East on the occasion of Cairo University’s Jubilee. He sponsored the editorial committee publishing

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted by G. Anawati in «Cahiers du Cercle Thomiste», April 1951, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> J JOMIER, *Le commentaire coranique du Manâr*, Maisonneuve et C<sup>ie</sup>, Paris, 1954, note 2, p. 54.

<sup>46</sup> M. M. Anawati, *Le département culturel de la Ligue arabe* in «MIDEO », 1954, I pp. 171-181.

Avicenna's works,<sup>47</sup> which, in coordination with the Arab League's cultural division, published an *Essai de Bibliographie avicennienne*;<sup>48</sup> he entrusted this committee with the mission of paving the way for a ground-breaking stage in Middle Eastern philosophic studies. The celebrations around the thousandth anniversary of the birth of Avicenna in Istanbul, Bagdad, Tehran, Cambridge and Paris<sup>49</sup> testified to the vibrancy of that academic circle.

Shaykh Mūsā inspired vocations among young Azharites, as did shaykh 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Mağīd his collaborator for the publication of the [“كتاب الإرشاد” “Guidebook”]<sup>50</sup> by Juwaynī (1028-1085), the teacher of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (1058-1111). He was possessed with the urge to have Western Orientalists and philosophers translated, notably the *Introduction à la philosophie musulmane* (1923) by Léon Gauthier (1862-1949), *Les philosophies orientales* (1940) by Indianist Paul Masson-Oursel (1882-1956), and *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (1950) by Emile Bréhier (1876-1952), so much so that some Ulama envisaged the creation of an “Orientalists' Library”.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the Vatican offered a scholarship towards the study of Avicenna's Latin manuscripts in Rome. The Egyptian government's choice went to Maḥmūd al-Ḥudayrī (d. 1961), the translator of the Discourse on the Method and author of a commentary in French of a work by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201-1274); drafted at the Sorbonne it was never defended or published.<sup>52</sup> During his stay in Europe, Ḥudayrī studied medieval Christian philosophy under Gilson, he catalogued Arab-Muslim thought's essential texts, for instance the edition of the *Tawḥīd* by Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (950-1013), and he identified two texts by Avicenna translated in Latin by a Christian from Northern Italy who had died at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> This precedent should have led to further scholarship exchanges between Egypt and the Vatican,<sup>54</sup> but the project could not be implemented for the intellectual outlook was changing.

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<sup>47</sup> The Committee included among others Ibrāhīm Madkūr, Maḥmūd al-Ḥudayrī, Aḥmad Fū'ad al-Ahwānī, Egyptian Dominican Georges C. Anawati and french Medievalist Thérèse d'Alverny

<sup>48</sup> G.C. ANAWATI, *Mu'allafāt Ibn Sīnā, Essai de bibliographie avicennienne*, Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif (LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES), 1950.

A *Bibliographie d'Ibn Sīnā* was published in Farsi by Yahyā Mahdavi (1908-2000).

<sup>49</sup> *Programme du Millénaire d'Avicenne*, Société pour les Monuments Nationaux, Tehran, April 1954.

<sup>50</sup> *Iršād* was translated into French parallelly with the Arabic by J. D. Luciani (1851-1932), professor of Muslim philosophy at the University of Algiers and published shortly after his death.

<sup>51</sup> G. C. Anawati, *Chronique des livres arabes*, in «Cahiers du Cercle thomiste», March 1947, p. 60.

<sup>52</sup> N. Baladi, *In memoriam Mahmoud el-Khodeiry* in «MIDEO», VI, 1959-1961, p. 538.

<sup>53</sup> J. Jomier, *Quelques positions actuelles de l'exégèse coranique en Égypte révélées par une polémique récente (1947-1951)* in «MIDEO», I, 1954, p. 68.

<sup>54</sup> G. C. Anawati, *Vers un dialogue islamo-chrétien* in «Revue thomiste», II, 1964, p. 287.

It emerged in a volley of warning signs. First came the press campaign against a pupil of Professor al-Ḥūlī, Muḥammad Aḥmad Kalafallāh (1904-1983). The author of a thesis titled “الفن القصصي في القرآن الكريم” [The Narrative Art in the Holy Qur'an],<sup>55</sup> Khalafallāh reached the conclusion that the Qu’ran was not a purveyor of historical facts but of spiritual guidance. Though the literary and psychological approach stealthily re-framed the problematics of the Qu’ran’s inimitability and of the Muslim’s relation to the text,<sup>56</sup> it did not dispute the “overall conception taught by the theologians concerning the Revelation”.<sup>57</sup> Still, approaching the Qur’an through the filter of “literary genre” was perceived as an intent to shift, partly at least, history as traditionally read towards myth, the “ultimate crime of atheism and ignorance” Maḡallat al-Azhar alleged. Khalafallāh did not quote Western scholars but he was never to defend his thesis before a panel, even though an expurgated version was published in 1951. His director, Amīn al-Ḥūlī, was forced out of his exegesis chair and restricted to the teaching of literary subjects. He would no less publish a complementary note to the “Tafsir” article in the Arabic version of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.<sup>58</sup> A few months earlier a young English-speaking Azharite Ḥālid Muḥammad Ḥālid, published “من هنا نبدأ” [“this is where we start”],<sup>59</sup> an essay inveighing against the university’s conservatism, the Muslim Brothers’ theocratic ambitions and Saudi Arabia’s social regime which he deemed archaic. Targeted in a campaign run by his fellows, the author had his book censored, its sales banned before a civil court re-authorised it.<sup>60</sup>

The anti-liberal political and philosophical trend intensified in authoritarian regimes shaken by polymorphous confrontations between the partisans of Nasserism, Baathism, Wahabism and Bannaism (namely the Muslim Brothers’ doctrine founded by Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-1949)) and diverse forms of Socialism. The main terms of what was conceived as a systematic riposte to Western intellectual inroads are set as early as 1953 by the Lebanese

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<sup>55</sup> M. A. Ḥalafallāh, «الفن القصصي في القرآن الكريم» [«The art of Storytelling in the Holy Qur’an»], 1951. The thesis went online on 5 January 2006, on the site [www.muhammadanism.org](http://www.muhammadanism.org)

<sup>56</sup> J. Jomier, *Quelques positions actuelles de l’exégèse coranique en Égypte révélées par une polémique récente (1947-1951)* in «MIDEO», I, 1954, p. 68.

<sup>57</sup> A. FILALI-ANSARY, *Réformer l’islam ? Une introduction aux débats contemporains*, La Découverte, Paris, 2003, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> J. Jomier-P. Caspar, *L’exégèse scientifique du Coran d’après le cheikh Amin al-Khouli* in, «MIDEO», IV, 1957, pp. 269-280.

<sup>59</sup> Ḥ.M Ḥālid, *من هنا نبدأ* [this is where we start], Dār al-Nīl lil-Ṭibā‘a, Cairo 1950.

<sup>60</sup> Georges Anawati, «Jeunesse d’Égypte. Témoignage d’un azhariste», *Cahiers du Cercle thomiste*, September 1950, p. 60.

Umar Farrukh (1904-1987), a member of the Arab Academy of Damascus and Muṣṭafā Ḥālīdī (1895-1978), the director of a medical school in Beirut. The substance of their essay “التبشير والاستعمار في البلاد العربية”, [“Proselytizing and colonialism in the Arab countries”], is as follows: since direct evangelising did not work, the Christians have turned to science, which they claim is neutral. The project of “Orientalist Library”, far from coming into being, was met with a rebuff even as the Orientalists, under the direction of Robert Brunschvig (1901-1990) and Gustav von Grunebaum (1909-1972), were addressing afresh the problematics of “*Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l’histoire de l’islam*”.<sup>61</sup> In 1958 Maḥmūd Abū Rayya (1889-1970), the author of “أضواء على السنة المحمدية” [“Spotlights on the Mohammedan Sunna”], which is of a piece with his critique of the Hadith was accused of collusion with the Orientalists by Muṣṭafā al-Sibā’ī (1915-1964), the leader of the Syrian Muslim Brothers.

One year earlier Shaykh Muḥammad al-Bahī (1905-1982) had sounded the alarm against the Orientalists and their Muslim “collaborators”. In his essay “مي الحديث وصلته بالاستعمار الغربي” [“Modern Islamic Thought and Its Connection to Western Colonialism”] which got several print runs, he targets both Eastern atheism and an enduring crusading spirit in the West. The crux of the matter is a denunciation of the attempt to Christianise Islam under pretence of modernisation by influencing Muslim thinkers and advancing deviant commentaries on Islam’s principles, and by praising Christian values and Western civilisation. The Orientalists were blamed on three counts: considering the Qur’an to be a human book finding its origin in the environment that fostered it or in the very life of the Prophet of Islam;<sup>62</sup> considering Islam solely in its religious capacity and denying its political dimension; reducing the faith to a collection of myths. By way of self-criticism, the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar admitted to three failures: a dichotomy in teaching, more precisely the deployment of a European mode of teaching whereby al-Azhar did not succeed in fulfilling its mission, namely instilling Islam’s doctrine; the weakness of the analysis of Muslim countries’ social difficulties, giving a free pass to the development of Socialist economic doctrines; al-Azhar’s inability to follow in the reforming spirit launched by Shaykh

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<sup>61</sup> *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l’histoire de l’Islam*, dir. R. Brunschvig-G. von Grunebaum, Besson et Chantemerle, Paris, 1957. The symposium ran from 25 to 29 June 1956, in Bordeaux, with addresses by Louis Gardet (1904-1986) ; Henrik Samuel Nyberg (1889-1974) ; Hellmut Ritter (1892-1971) ; Georges-Henri Bousquet (1900-1978) ; Claude Cahen (1909-1991) ; Joseph Schacht (1902-1969) ; Fritz Meier (1912-1998) ; Armand Abel (1903-1973) ; Roger Arnaldez (1911-2006) ; Henri Massé (1886-1969).

<sup>62</sup> Muḥammad al-Bahī, *الفكر الإسلامي الحديث وصلته بالاستعمار الغربي*, [Modern Islamic Thought and Its Connection to Western Colonialism], Dār al-Fikr, Cairo, 1991 (1957<sup>1</sup>), pp. 225-248.

Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905). And yet it was indeed at al-Hazar that, according to him, the success of Arabism and the renewal of Muslim societies would be decided.

Catholic-wise, the Dominicans and the White Fathers put forward the concept of a sharing of experience between the missionaries involved in the study of Islam and encounters with Muslims. In the mid-fifties, from Cairo, Anawati concurred on the project with Jacques Lanfry (1910-2000) in Algiers and Demeerseman in Tunis. He took on the administrative tasks and sent Massignon a preliminary draft wherein he also sought his advice.<sup>63</sup> The first *Journées Romaines* were organised in the Italian capital in September 1956<sup>64</sup> focussed on one process; the object was to enable secular priests and religious of both sexes to report lived experiences, to compare notes and get up to date with the most recent Islam-related theoretical studies. Under the aegis of the White Fathers, the *Journées Romaines* would be organised every other year as from that date. Lay people were not included and the meetings did not occasion any publications. During the Second Vatican Council, this group pro-acted to the effect that, without ever introducing the term “Qur’an” or the name of Muhammad, the Council Fathers uttered some positive words about the Muslims, some elements of their faith and their practice.

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At the death of Pope Pius 12<sup>th</sup>, France was going through a political crisis around the future of Algeria. General Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) obtained the majority of votes in favour of a new constitution; he carried on with the war with in mind the project to have ‘self-determination’ (read independence) accepted the following year. Along with the rest of the citizenry, French Catholics were divided. While calls for peace were met with widespread approval, some defended to the bitter end the inclusion of Algeria within France while other advocated for her independence. In November 1958, after presiding over the symposium “*Islam-Occident*”, Anawati stopped over at Algiers where he had a long discussion with Mgr.

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from Anawati to Massignon, 8 September 1955 in «Correspondance Massignon-Anawati» Archives IDEO, cit..

<sup>64</sup> R. CAUCANAS, *Jacques Lanfry. Un lion, l'Église et l'Islam*, preface M. L. Fitzgerald, postface I. Macconi Heckner, PISAI, Rome, 2021, pp. 148-163.



Léon-Étienne Duval (1903-1996) and the White Fathers. He acquired the conviction that some of the latter had no awareness of any epochal change. Disagreements and tensions are the common lot of the orders,<sup>65</sup> congregations and the whole of the French Church who “condemn[ed] the atrocities and affirm[ed] the Algerian people’s right to freedom”<sup>66</sup> but without taking a clear stand for independence. The fate of more than one million *pieds noirs* (Algerians of European origin) weighed heavily on these divergences. The vast majority of them left Algeria in 1962 and, what with the withdrawal of their fellow countrymen living in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, French Catholicism found itself deprived of a significant part of its Mediterranean dimension.

French Catholicism would maintain three outlooks towards Islam and the Muslims.<sup>67</sup> That represented by Cardinal Tisserant was marginalised but did not disappear. That reflecting Massignon’ thought was upheld by one of his disciples, Abbé Youakim Moubarac. The White Fathers’ and the Dominican’s intermediate stance prevailed at the Council where the role of the French specialists proved decisive on the matter. For the non-specialist readership, Louis Gardet was not above undertaking a popularising task, publishing *Connaître l’Islam* (1958) (Mohammedanism (1961)), which was translated in major European Languages while pursuing academic research often in collaboration with Anawati. In *Mystique musulmane* (1961), he sustained a twofold claim: on the one hand, Muslim mysticism is born of an “innermost meditation of the Qur’an”; on the other hand, there is no possibility of a “Muslim philosophy” in the sense in which Thomism is a “Christian philosophy” or of a full “mystical experience” without a faith in Christ, barring exceptions. Within that current, the desire to convert Muslims to the Christian faith in the mid or long term, has not been foregone, but it should not result in straightforward evangelisation, it must translate into a life of prayer, the study of Islam and a sound relationship with Muslims.<sup>68</sup>

The Catholic Magisterium sought to keep apart the question of the relations between Christians, Muslims and Jews and the existence of the State Israel, proclaimed in 1948 but not recognised by Rome until 1993. There is no escaping the fact that on the ground, the

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<sup>65</sup> J. J. PÈRENNÈS, *Pierre Claverie. Un Algérien par alliance*, Cerf, Paris, 2000, p. 80.

<sup>66</sup> G. C. Anawati, in «Nouvelles culturelles», in «MIDEO», VI, 1959-1961, p. 518.

<sup>67</sup> M. YOUNÈS, *Les approches chrétiennes de l’islam. Tensions, déplacements, enjeux*, Cerf, Paris, 2020, pp. 309-322.

<sup>68</sup> S. de Beaurecueil, *Quelques idées sur l’éventuelle fondation d’une congrégation religieuse copte*, 4 pages, in «Archives IDEO, Frères de la Prédication de Saint-Marc», 27 octobre 1957.

relationship to Israel and the closeness<sup>69</sup> to Arabs, be they Muslims or Christians<sup>70</sup> had a bearing on the positions adopted by Catholic French people. This background hastened Muslim scholars' mobilisation against what they termed the collusion of the Orientalists<sup>71</sup> with the Christian missionaries.<sup>72</sup> In 1959 the translation into Arabic of *Le dogme et la loi en islam*<sup>73</sup> a book by Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) prefaced by Shaykh Yūsuf Mūsā got such a slating from his peers that he decided to leave al-Hazar University. He was the object of a critique from his colleague Muḥammad al-Ġazālī (1917-1996) who, in “دفاع عن العقيدة والشريعة” [“Defending faith and Sharia against the onslaught of the Orientalists”] “ضد مطاعن المستشرقين” [“Defending faith and Sharia against the onslaught of the Orientalists”] warns against *ġazū al-fikrī* [“the subjugation of thought”], allegedly driven by such Arab hubs as the American Universities of Beirut and Cairo. This claim was to become a mantra in Muslim religious groupings up to the end of the century.

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<sup>69</sup> J. Berque -L. Massignon, *Dialogue sur “Les Arabes* in «Esprit», octobre 1960, p. 1506.

<sup>70</sup> *Nouvelles culturelles. Le Congrès des écrivains arabes*, in «MIDEO», IV 1957, p. 357.

<sup>71</sup> R. BRUNSCHVIG *Situation de l'Islamologie* in «Études d'islamologie», I, Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1976, p. 42-43.

<sup>72</sup> J. Jomier, *La pensée musulmane moderne et ses relations avec l'impérialisme occidental* in, «MIDEO», VII, 1962-1963, p. 378.

<sup>73</sup> M. AL-ĠAZĀLĪ, *دفاع عن العقيدة والشريعة ضد مطاعن المستشرقين* [Defending faith and Sharia against the onslaught of the Orientalists], Nahdat Miṣr, Cairo, 2002 (c. 1960<sup>1</sup>), p. 25-26.