

Muslim and Catholic Perspectives on Disability in the Contemporary Context of Turkey: A Proposal for Muslim-Christian Dialogue

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Boston College
School of Theology and Ministry

**Muslim and Catholic Perspectives on Disability
in the Contemporary Context of Turkey:
A Proposal for Muslim-Christian Dialogue**

A Dissertation

by

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for the degree of
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**Muslim and Catholic Perspectives on Disability in the Contemporary Context of Turkey:
A Proposal for Muslim-Christian Dialogue**

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Abstract

Starting from the reality that we all live in multicultural pluralistic societies, and as such we cannot ignore each other but all must share our respective religious-cultural heritages and learn from one and another, this dissertation argues that although the theological dialogue among religions is to be promoted and developed constantly, we also have to give major space to other forms of dialogue, namely a dialogue based on bioethical issues and/or daily life related problems that is part of our everyday religious experience. Therefore, in order to show this is possible, although with many difficulties to be faced along the way, the dissertation proposes disability as a common ground for Muslim-Christian dialogue and collaboration in the context of Turkey.

The dissertation is structured into four chapters. Chapter I is focused on some characteristics of interreligious dialogue and, more particularly, on Muslim-Christian dialogue and disability. This chapter provides a broad descriptive introduction and establishes the framework within which these are considered: i.e., The Republic of Turkey, Islam and the presence of the Latin Catholic Church in Turkey. The chapter begins with a review of the foundations and history of the development of interreligious dialogue in the Catholic Church. Next, it proceeds with a presentation of Turkey and the major actors of Muslim-Christian dialogue in the country. Then, it concludes with a global focus on the situation of disability in Turkey.

Chapters II and III are dedicated, respectively, to the Muslim and Catholic Church's perspectives on disability, and so, share the same structure: Following general introductions to Islam and the Catholic Church, they analyze the Scriptures of their respective traditions, the Quran and the Bible, and their other major sources such as the Hadith and Islamic law in the former, and the Code of Canon Law, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in the latter. By focusing on various topics such as

marriage of persons with disabilities, abortion of disabled fetus, Christian initiation and access to the sacraments, degrees of disabilities as impediment for priestly ordination, these two chapters aim to find the reverberations of the scriptural narratives in the teachings of these two traditions. After examining the historical development of some theodicy approaches to the dilemma of human suffering, the problem of evil, the existence of disabilities and God's love, and wisdom and justice, this chapter ends by highlighting some applications in their contemporary contexts. In this regard, Chapter II presents two examples from Turkey: the controversial Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen's approach to people with disabilities as "*garip*" (piteous, pitiful) and Muslim-Turkish scholar Mustafa Naci Kula's research on the relationship between attitudes toward persons with disabilities and religious attitudes, which has provided considerable insight on the perception of disability in Turkish society. Parallel to this, Chapter III presents a Catholic figure, Nancy Mairs, who, in her writings, by dealing with personal disabilities, offers a contemporary version of classical theodicy approaches found in Catholic teaching in thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Irenaeus.

The final chapter, Chapter IV, by the method of comparison, highlights relevant commonalities and differences and proceeds by discussing some relevant issues related to Muslim-Christian dialogue. Then, by reflecting on how disability can be a common ground on which to build fertile dialogue and collaboration, it concludes with a proposal which privileges five among many other possible topics: (1) Sin and disability seen as punishment; (2) Consanguineous marriages (3rd and 4th degree); (3) Abortion as a method to prevent birth of potentially disabled child; (4) Abuse of disabled women and children; and, (5) Charity and praying together. The first topic is based on the conviction that disability is given by God as a punishment for sin; it is one of the major beliefs that is shared among Muslims and Christians. The second, third and fourth topics are related to some social problems in Turkish society, namely, consanguineous marriages, abortion as a prevention of potentially disabled children, and the abuse of women and children with disabilities. Finally, the fifth topic aims at constructing dialogue and collaboration between Muslims and Christians through charitable works in Turkey. These topics are points related to the four main forms of dialogue proposed by *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) of Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, which are considered in this dissertation in a three-fold version: (1) Theological dialogue; (2) Dialogue of life experience and action; and, (3) Dialogue based on religious life experience.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKP *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)

c. Canon

CC Catholic Church

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

CSA Child sexual abuse

CSD Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

CST Catholic Social Teaching

DM Dialogue and Mission (PCID, 1984)

DP Dialogue and Proclamation (PCID, 1991)

EG Evangelii gaudium (Francis, 2013)

EN Evangelii nuntiandi (Paul VI, 1975)

ES Ecclesiam suam (Paul VI, 1964)

GE Gravissimum educationis (Vatican II, 1965)

GS Gaudium et spes (Vatican II, 1965)

NA Nostra aetate (Vatican II, 1965)

OT Optatam totius (Vatican II, 1965)

PCID Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

PWD People with disabilities

RM Redemptoris missio (John Paul II, 1990)

TCC Turkish Civil Code

WHO World Health Organization

WRD World Report on Disability

Note: Citations of Church documents are made by indicating the abbreviation followed by the section number (e.g. *NA* 3 instead of *Nostra aetate* 3). They are mostly from the English translations available on the Vatican website <http://www.vatican.va>, unless otherwise specified.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the main characteristics of modern societies is that a single religious belief system can no longer command a universally accepted moral authority. Nonetheless, different religious traditions and their derived ethical norms still play a major role in the moral formation of societies and their professionals. Moreover, today's pluralistic societies not only offer multiple opportunities for exchange and dialogue between various religions but also for conflicts and confrontations. This applies in particular to Christianity and Islam, both of which originated in the same geographical area that is now called the Middle East. The oldest surviving religion in this area is Judaism, and both Christianity and Islam are based to a considerable extent on the faith, law, and ethical teachings of Judaism. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are monotheistic religions that profess faith in one supreme God, and base their teaching and spiritual life on their sacred Scriptures and tradition.

Islam is the faith of approximately 1.6 billion people, and Muslims are the fastest growing religious group in the world. By 2050, the Muslim population will come very close to approaching the number of Christians, each making up one-third of the world's population. While the Christian population is projected to rise to 2.92 billion, Muslims will grow by more than one billion, to 2.76 billion. Muslims can be found spread over a large portion of the globe, from their historic origins in Mecca to the farthest corners of the globe. Their presence is also

growing, mainly through immigration, in Europe, the Americas, and Australia.¹ This inevitable and constantly increasing coexistence, beyond all the current discussions about Islamic “fundamentalism,” limitations to freedom of thought, conscience, and so on, is particularly enriching. For this reason, in order to better strengthen this coexistence, we need to know Islam. The principal aim of this dissertation is, therefore, to contribute to an ongoing Muslim-Christian dialogue.

A) Dialoguing with Islam by Focusing on Disability

Dialogue can be understood in different ways. As *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP) of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) outlines it, dialogue first can be at the purely human level, with reciprocal communication which can lead to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion. Second, dialogue can be taken as an attitude of respect and/or friendship, which permeates all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church, and so this can appropriately be called the spirit of dialogue. Third, in the context of religious pluralism, all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths, which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to truth and respect for freedom, can be considered as dialogue, and, as such, include both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions.² In this sense, the Church believes that, Muslim-Christian dialogue is “a vital necessity, on which in large measure our

¹ Drew Desilver and David Masci, “World’s Muslim Population More Widespread Than You Might Think,” PRC, January 31, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/31/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/>.

² See PCID, *Dialogue and Proclamation* [Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ], May 19, 1991.

future depends.”³ This affirmation of Benedict XVI may sound hyperbolic. Does our future really depend on interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians? Is it truly a vital necessity? Yes, our future does necessarily depend on it. I believe, indeed, that in a world where there are many ongoing wars and conflicts caused by religious differences, it, perhaps paradoxically so, is also possible for religions to collaborate to improve the quality of human life as well as to bring to the fore human dignity which we all share regardless of our beliefs, skin color, and gender.

How can dialogue lead to better collaboration between Muslims and Christians? What kind of collaboration may be possible? These are the main questions around which I develop my dissertation, and therefore lead one to explore in detail what I propose as a ground for a possible faith-based collaboration between Muslims and Christians. I am presenting a concrete ground on which to reflect and discuss: disability. I presuppose that a dialogue between different cultures and religions about disabilities based on bioethics is possible. Today, bioethical issues can be a bridge to give more opportunities to the religions of the world to talk with each other for the good of humankind. It can start by locating many shared values related to human life from its beginning to its natural end. Dialogue can be effective and productive by promoting a profound knowledge of different positions, their ultimate foundations, and the development of moral reflection with their historical and religious coordinates. The purpose of the dialogue is not, as is commonly thought, to achieve the lowest common denominator of agreement, but rather it is to draw on the sources of respective traditions which, in the case of believers, influence personal and public choices demanded by the extraordinary progress of science and modern bio-medical technologies: “An organized social exchange of views can be achieved through intercultural and

³ Benedict XVI, “Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy,” September 25, 2006, Vatican Website.

interreligious forums of discussion about bioethical themes. Likewise, they contribute to a mutual understanding between those who believe and think differently from one another and create a space for understanding and tolerance.”⁴

It is undeniable that bioethics and particular religious beliefs interact; for some of the current philosophical discussions on ethical issues originate from theological ethics based on particular religious beliefs. Nowadays we are living in modern, multicultural and secular societies, and we are searching for a common understanding of ethical dilemmas, making dialogue on urgent international health issues crucially important. The cornerstone of a necessary peaceful cohabitation is mutual knowledge, promotion of a culture of dialogue and respectful mutual acceptance. I am convinced that an interreligious dialogue based on life issues related to the beginning of life, its healthy preservation, and its end can be very effective. Indeed, although these issues are first and foremost anthropological and social, they are also all common issues in both Christianity and Islam. Believers of both religions have questions about them and are looking for convincing answers.

Some unexpected and negative episodes and situations such as accidents, natural disasters, chronic illnesses, violence, or disabilities do occur and they affect people’s lives directly or indirectly and provoke in them deep feelings. This kind of reaction is radically human, and so it is normal that people who face these and similar situations start questioning why these events occurred in order to give them some meaning. Throughout the centuries philosophers and theologians belonging to different religions have reflected on the following fundamental question: “Can one hold, consistently with [the] common view of suffering in the world, that

⁴ İlhan İlkılıç, “New Bioethical Problems as a Challenge for Muslims,” *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* 6 (2005), <https://them.polylog.org/6/fii-en.htm#s4>.

there is an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God?”⁵ Consequently, there have been some philosophers and theologians who tried to defend the theistic belief despite the persistence of evil in the universe, as well as those who claimed “that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God.”⁶

One of these issues is disability, which is part of the human condition as “[a]lmost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life, and those who survive to old age will experience increasing difficulties in functioning.”⁷ Each of us remains vulnerable to acquiring a disability even when we are able-bodied and/or able-minded. Our bodily functions are not only physiological but also psychological. Disabilities arise when these functions and structures of the body are affected by disorders, which can be caused by genetic, infectious, and/or accidental reasons. The consequence is that bodily functions and structures are no longer able to execute their proper functions and so activities become limited.

Disability is a very extensive topic and has multiple layers, such as its social, economic, psychological, and health dimensions, which concern issues like the employment of people with disabilities (PWD), their physical and psychological treatment, the creation of the necessary infrastructure to ensure their effective and efficient participation in social life, the economic support both to PWD and to their families; all of these aspects constitute disability. If we look into the history of humanity, we can see disability and PWD in all periods. “Most extended families have a disabled member, and many non-disabled people take responsibility for

⁵ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 3.

⁶ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 3; see also Mehmet S. Aydın, *Din felsefesi* (Ankara: Selçuk Yayınları, 1992), 147; Necip Taylan, *İslam düşüncesinde din felsefeleri* (İstanbul: M.Ü. İFAV, 1994), 97.

⁷ World Health Organization, *World Report on Disability* (Malta: WHO, 2011), 3.

supporting and caring for their relatives and friends with disabilities.”⁸ PWD, as well as their loved ones, have questioned disability and its presence in their lives: What did I do in order to deserve this disability? Is my disability a punishment for my deeds? Is my disability a test given by God? If God is almighty and merciful, why does God permit the disability? Especially in cases of children with disabilities before or soon after their birth, families experience some inevitable “natural and universal”⁹ feelings, in addition to the questions mentioned above. It follows, then, that religion can be a very effective tool or resource in helping disabled persons and their families to accept the situation of PWD, to develop a positive self-concept, and to overcome the experiences of the disability in question. To believe in a transcendent being effectuates in believers a confidence. The believers, by believing in God, rely on their faith and do not feel alone because of the presence of other believers in society, and so gain self-assurance to cope with the difficulties that maybe related to the disability in question.

On the other hand, religion can also provide some cognitive explications that are helpful in better understanding the situation of disability. Just to cite one example, for a Muslim believer the following verse of the Quran can provide strength and encourage him or her to accept life with a disability: “And We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits; and give glad tidings to the patient—those who, when affliction befalls them, say, ‘Truly we are God’s, and unto Him we return’” (2:155-156).¹⁰ According to Muhammed Hamdi Yazır, who was a very well-known Turkish theologian and Quran translator, these verses signify that in this world humankind will be tested through some life issues and their attitude in coping with these issues will determine the depth of their faith. The key to passing the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Latife Bıyıklı, *Bedensel özürlü çocukların benlik kavramı* (Ankara: A.Ü. E.B.F., 1989), 5.

¹⁰ All references from the Quran are taken from Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., eds., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2015).

test consists in enduring the situation, striving to overcome difficulties, and turning to God. In this way, the Muslim believer can fulfill his or her duty to be a servant (*kul*).¹¹ The same may be true for a Christian believer who reads and contemplates the following verses from James: “Count it all joy, my brothers [and sisters], when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:2-4).¹²

Sometimes these religious arguments are not sufficient for understanding and dealing with the situation of disability, and PWD can easily face some religious crises and/or doubts. Humankind deals continuously with different facts and events – e.g., natural disasters, deaths, wars, torture, and sickness – that cause the person to question the existence of an almighty and good God. The question a believer might have is: “Why did God give me this disability?” This is a natural consequence of a conception of a god based on fear and punishment.¹³ PWD can easily consider themselves culpable, sinful and unfaithful, and so punished. According to Hayati Hökelekli, an expert in the psychology of religion, feelings of culpability and sinfulness can have two opposite outcomes. On the one hand, a believer who faces these feelings can walk away from penitence and repentance, and even despise and attack moral and religious values. On the other hand, the same feelings can push a person to reconsider his or her deeds, and to undertake

¹¹ Muhammed H. Yazır, *Hak dini, Kuran dili: Türkçe tefsir*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Eser Neşriyat, 1960), 452.

¹² All Scripture references are taken from Donald Senior et al., eds., *The Catholic Study Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹³ Mustafa Naci Kula, “Gençlerde ızdırap tecrübesine bağlı dini krizle başa çıkmaya yönelik öneriler,” (paper presented at the Youth and Education - II, Scientific Discussion Meeting for the Foundation for Research in Islamic Sciences, Istanbul, 2003), 118.

moral and religious duties with serenity.¹⁴ Without a doubt, for the realization of a process of the latter kind, a conception of a god based on love can play a big role.¹⁵

Given growing awareness, the question of disability has been studied from different perspectives: sociological, psychological, medicinal, economical, philosophical, and religious. Regarding the religious perspective, in my opinion, disability has been questioned mostly by relying on the psychology and sociology of religion. However, even though there are some studies on perspectives of single religions on disability and many other studies on interreligious dialogue based on major issues of bioethics, such as abortion, death and dying, procreation, etc., the academic field lacks studies which aim at an interreligious dialogue based on Muslim and Catholic theological perspectives on disability. That said, and given the extensiveness of disability, this dissertation focuses primarily on Muslim and Catholic perspectives on disability and PWD, and as a theological perspective I take under reflection both Christian and Muslim theodicies. Theodicy, generally speaking, deals with problems associated with evil, sin, and suffering. I choose theodicy as a theological perspective, because as I hope to demonstrate, both Muslim and Christian theodicies have many commonalities and, in the particular case of disability and PWD, their reflections concur on several points, such as the connection between sin and disability, God's punishment, etc. Therefore, the theodicies offer a fertile ground on which to propose an interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Catholics.

The results of this study will then lead to a reflection on how Muslims and Catholics can dialogue through disability using as a collaborative starting point the commonalities and differences of their perspectives on disabilities.

¹⁴ Hayati Hökelekli, *Din psikolojisi* (Ankara: TDV, 1996), 106. Hökelekli here refers mostly to Islam; however, the same considerations can be made about Christianity, too.

¹⁵ Kula, "Dini krizle başa çıkmaya yönelik öneriler," 118.

B) Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Turkey

Given my Turkish origins and my future mission related partly to Turkey, this secular and Muslim country is the principal focus of my research. Indeed, Turkey is one of the major Muslim countries, and within the context of the worldwide resurgence of religion, it “constitutes a sociologically illuminating and theoretically challenging case.”¹⁶ Founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938, hereinafter Atatürk), on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, whose state and social life were governed by Islamic religious dictates, modern Turkey has made many reforms in the judicial system and education, and created a new state structure, not based on religion but on the principle of secularism, and the nation-state was established. While Atatürk opposed the influence of Islam and other religions in the public sphere, the Islamists have always sought to maintain Islam’s hegemonic status. Modern Turkey in its constitution, promulgated in 1982 after the third military coup in its history, is declared a democratic, laic, social republic, governed by law. The constitution establishes the equality of all citizens before the law without distinction of opinion or religion and recognizes freedom of conscience and thought. As in any democratic secular system, in the promulgation of laws, Turkey also takes into account the cultural, social, and religious elements of its citizens.

Looking at contemporary Turkish society from a perspective of Muslim-Christian dialogue, the following elements come up: First and foremost, there is *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Presidency of Religious Affairs of Republic of Turkey, hereinafter Diyanet), the symbolic institution of the said laic character of Turkish Republic, which is currently the most important partner in Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey. Established in 1924, by a law which separates

¹⁶ İftar B. Gözaydın, “Religion, Politics, and the Politics of Religion in Turkey,” in *Governance, Security and Development: Religion, Politics, and Turkey’s EU Accession*, ed. Dietrich Jung et al. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 161.

religious affairs from those of the state, today, the Diyanet is still the main institution responsible for running a wide range of religious services. It directly manages all the mosques in Turkey and their salaried officials such as imams, Quran instructors, muezzins, and other religious workers. The Diyanet has always been at the center of growing criticisms directed to the *laïcité* of Turkey, and while it allows for the separation between the state and those religious entities, it contradictorily gives to the state the authority of the organization and management of religious affairs.

Along with the Diyanet there are other actors such as Fethullah Gülen and his “Hizmet” (Service) movement which lost their credibility because of the failed coup of July 15th in 2016, as he was accused to be the “alleged mastermind behind the coup.”¹⁷ Other actors of dialogue are academics of divinity schools; however, as a result of a “purge” made following the coup attempt, hundreds of them are imprisoned or have lost their positions. On the Christian side is the Latin Catholic Church, which in today’s Turkey is only a small part of a group of Christians that includes between 100,000 and 150,000 people (0.15 percent of the population). Structured in three divisions, namely, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Izmir, the Apostolic Vicariate of Istanbul and the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia, the legal personality of Latin Catholic Church is not recognized by the Turkish state. Although the Church faces significant problems and lacks

¹⁷ A booklet distributed by Turkish Consulate General in Boston, MA reads as follows: “On the night of July 15, a small military junta linked to the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization (FETO) attempted a coup d’état against the elected Turkish government and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that ultimately failed. The coup plotters tried to seize key provinces in Turkey including Istanbul and Ankara. Police forces, a vast majority of the army, the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and members of the bureaucracy stood against the coup attempt, raising their voices after the President’s call to the nation to take to the streets. A total of 238 lost their lives and 2190 were injured.” Sena Alkan et al., ed. *July 15: Gülenist Coup Attempt*, Report 3 (Istanbul: Daily Sabah Centre for Policy Studies, 2016), 3; see also Ra’fat Al-Dajani and Drew Christiansen, “Who is Fethullah Gülen?” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/who-fethullah-gulen>.

personnel, it does the very humble work of caring for refugees and migrants, publishing and, to a very limited extent, ecumenical and Muslim-Christian dialogue activities.

C) Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation starts from the reality that we all live in multicultural pluralistic societies, and as such we cannot ignore each other but all must share our respective religious-cultural heritages and learn from one another. Another starting point is my conviction that, although the theological dialogue among religions is to be constantly promoted and developed, we also have to give major space to other forms of dialogue, e.g. a dialogue based on bioethical issues and/or daily-life-related problems that is part of our everyday religious experience. In other words, we, especially religious men and women, have a duty and responsibility to unify and share our spiritual, religious-cultural heritage and academic preparation in order to heal the wounds of our brothers and sisters with whom we share the dignity of being created by God, our Creator. Therefore, in order to show that it is possible, although with many difficulties to be faced along the way, I propose a Muslim-Christian dialogue based on disability in the context of Turkey with all its aforementioned elements.

This dissertation has four chapters. The first is a descriptive, contextual introduction that gives the necessary background for the elaboration of the topic. The second and third chapters present a descriptive articulation of the basic argument, while the fourth chapter discusses the conclusions of the previous chapters and outlines a common ground for sustained dialogue. The dialogue proposed in this dissertation is a Muslim-Christian dialogue. Therefore, where I use the term “interreligious dialogue” I intend it in its broadest sense, as defined by the aforementioned document DP—that is, “in the context of religious plurality, all positive and constructive

interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths.” In other places, instead, I chose to use “Muslim-Christian dialogue.”

Given the breadth of the topic, regarding Islam, since the word “Islam” incorporates vast realities, methodologically, I consider mostly the Sunni Islamic perspective on disability and the primary context is contemporary Turkey. The same restrictive criteria are also valid for Christianity, and for the same reasons my research and reflections are primarily focused on the Catholic perspective on disability. Considerations of papal and episcopal documents and Canon Law enter into this category. However, this choice does not keep me from having a more extensive perspective, especially where I study contemporary Christian reflections on disability and PWD.

The first chapter is focused on some characteristics of interreligious dialogue and, more particularly, on Muslim-Christian dialogue and disability, the two major pedestals of this dissertation. Moreover, it establishes the framework within which I consider them: Turkey, Islam, and the Latin Catholic Church. Following four main objectives – to clarify the terminology related to interreligious dialogue, disability, and PWD; to establish the geo-political and socio-cultural borders of this dissertation’s focus which is the contemporary Republic of Turkey; to present the major partners of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey; and, finally, to present a picture of disability in the current Turkish society – I first review the foundations and history of the development of interreligious dialogue in the Catholic Church (CC). Next, I proceed with a broad presentation of the Republic of Turkey and the aforementioned major actors of Muslim-Christian dialogue in this country. Then, I conclude with a global focus on the situation of disability in Turkey, as disability in this dissertation is proposed as a common ground for further Muslim-Christian dialogue and collaboration.

The second chapter is dedicated to the Muslim perspectives on disability, preceded by a general introduction to Islam and the roots of its law. In this chapter I first study all of the usages of disability in the Turkish language. This study is important for this dissertation because classical Arabic, which is the language of Islam, is neither our language nor our culture, and therefore our perspectives on disability are shaped by the Turkish language. Then, I study disability in the Quran and the Sunna, the two major roots of the Islamic law, along with some various topics such as marriage of PWD and abortion of a disabled fetus under the prescript of Islamic law. Muslims indeed regard the Quran as the literal word of God, an uncontested source of wisdom and law, and give great holiness to the Sunna. Next, I study some Islamic theodicy and anti-theodicy¹⁸ approaches to the dilemma of human suffering, the existence of disabilities and God's wisdom and justice. After examining the historical development of the theological understanding of the problem of evil, I highlight some echoes of this theological journey in the socio-religious life of current Turkish society. Even though for general information I refer from time to time to Muslim authors outside of Turkey, given the coordinates of this dissertation, the focus is primarily on the Turkish-Muslim perspective on disability.

The third chapter, built on the model of the previous one, starts from the conviction that the experience of disability challenges the Christian community, because the love of God for creation, God's preference for the little ones, the poor, the sick, as revealed in the Scriptures, is emphasized both in the teaching and in the work of the Church. Therefore, in this chapter, after giving some general information on the history and structure of the CC, I exam the Scriptures related to PWD. Then, I proceed to the Code of Canon Law and other sources of CC teaching,

¹⁸ The use of this term along with "pro-theodicy" is Mohammed Ghaly's and I am adopting them from him. Ghaly is currently professor of Islam and Biomedical Ethics of the Center for Islamic Legislation & Ethics (CILE) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University.

such as the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSD), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), followed by some considerations about the CC's activities in Turkey in relation to PWD. No matter whether one is Catholic or Muslim, all peoples affected by disabilities, PWD and their loved ones, pose important and difficult theological questions for the believer, as they try to reconcile the love of God with the reality of living with disabilities. Around this inevitable human questioning much theological reflection has developed. Therefore, in the second part, I concentrate on some theodicy approaches in Christian thinking. Understanding the Catholic perspective toward PWD is important not merely to fulfill a moral obligation, because an intention of this kind would not be enough by itself, but to dialogue with other faiths as envisaged by this dissertation.

The final chapter is divided in two parts. With the information about Muslim and Catholic perspectives on disability and PWD established, in the first part, by the method of comparison, I highlight relevant commonalities and differences. In the second part, I continue by discussing some relevant issues related to Muslim-Christian dialogue. Then, by reflecting on how disability can be a common ground on which to build a fertile dialogue, I conclude with a proposal on how Muslim-Christian dialogue and collaboration can be based on disability and PWD. This proposal privileges five among many other possible topics. The first topic is based on the popular conviction that disability is given by God as a punishment for sin; it is one of the major beliefs that is shared. The second, third and fourth topics are related to social problems in Turkish society, namely, consanguineous marriages, abortion as prevention of a potentially disabled child, and abuse of women and children with disabilities. Finally, the fifth topic aims at constructing dialogue and collaboration between Muslims and Christians through charitable works in Turkey.

II. MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND DISABILITY IN TURKEY: COORDINATES AND CHARACTERISTICS

In this chapter, I present some characteristics of interreligious dialogue and disability as two major pedestals of this dissertation, and establish the coordinates within which I consider them: Turkey, Islam, and the presence of the Latin Catholic Church in that country. I have four main objectives, and these objectives will be reached in a cumulative argumentative process running all the way through the following sections. My first objective is to clarify the terminology related to Muslim-Christian dialogue, disability, and PWD. The second is to establish the geo-political and socio-cultural borders of this dissertation's focus, which is my country of origin, the contemporary Republic of Turkey. The third objective is to present the major partners of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey, and the fourth objective is to present a picture of disability in the current Turkish population. In order to reach these objectives, this first chapter is structured in three main sections.

In the first section, dedicated to interreligious dialogue, starting from *Nostra aetate* (NA) to our days, I retrace the history and development of dialogue in general and of Muslim-Christian dialogue in particular in the magisterium of the CC. In the second section, dedicated to the Republic of Turkey and the major actors of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey, after presenting milestones of the country's history and its major dynamics, I bring attention to three major parties of ongoing Muslim-Christian dialogue with Turkey: The Diyanet, the Latin Catholic Church, and Fethullah Gülen and his Hizmet Movement, along with some other Turkish

scholars. In the subsection dedicated to the Latin Catholic Church, I retrace the history and development of Vatican-Turkish relationships and hence the Apostolic visits of Popes to Turkey for their speeches and statements give significant insights for the difficult Muslim-Christian dialogue journey with Turkey. In the third and last section of this chapter, I finally introduce the disability proposed in this dissertation as a common ground on which to dialogue. Following some considerations regarding the terminology of “disability,” “disabled,” and their derivatives, I conclude with a global focus on the situation of disability in Turkey.

A) Interreligious Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each without eliminating or ignoring their differences. In this sense, “a cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions can be built at both the institutional and individual level.”¹ In this section starting from some definitions of dialogue I firstly present the penetration of dialogue in the discourse of the Church and the development of interreligious dialogue at the Second Vatican Council (hereinafter Vatican II). I argue that the appearance of the idea of openness to other religions through dialogue does not start only with Vatican II, as is usually thought and said, because in Paul VI’s 1964 encyclical letter *Ecclesiam suam* (ES) one can find the first efforts to present a theological foundation, the character and different forms of dialogue. Then I proceed with the post-Vatican II period, by highlighting some significant documents related to interreligious dialogue created by the magisterium of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis; this excursus will not only show the perception and development of

¹ Gerard Forde, ed., *A Journey Together: A Resource for Christian Muslim Dialogue* (Cork: Cois Tine, 2013), 7.

Vatican II's insights on dialogue with other religions in post-Vatican II era, it will moreover present the coordinates of interreligious dialogue with Turkey taken under examination in the following section.

1. Interreligious Dialogue at Vatican II

Paul VI defines dialogue as an “internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity” (ES 64). In *Dialogue and Mission* (DM), brought out by the Secretariat for Non-Christians (known since 1988 as PCID), dialogue is seen as

a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, his modes of expression, and his values. Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation.²

On the other hand, the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP), produced jointly by the PCID and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 1991 points out that “the dialogue covers ‘all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment,’ in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions.”³

² Secretariat for Non-Christians, *Dialogue and Mission: The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of other Religions* [Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission], PCID Website, June 10, 1984, n. 29, http://www.pcinterreligious.org/dialogue-and-mission_75.html.

³ PCID, *Dialogue and Proclamation* [Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ], May 19, 1991, n. 9, www.vatican.va.

How did the term “dialogue” penetrate the discourse of the Church? According to Damian Howard, a British Jesuit expert in Muslim-Christian relations, three significant factors deserve to be acknowledged. The first is the Trinity itself, which presents the ontological origin of our dialogue. The dialogue we seek is based on the intimate life of the three divine Persons: the Father’s all-pervading love; in the mystery of the liberating presence of Christ in every human encounter; and in the Spirit who animates all life. The second factor has been the agenda of Vatican II which, while it was looking for progress toward unity with non-Catholic Christians, found a way to speak of the presence of grace in others. This opening of the borders gave a new impetus to the self-understanding of the Church as a sacramental entity. As a result, an ecclesiology of this kind inevitably had implications for the relations of the Church to other religious communities. The third factor, which is connected with the first two, is the turning point of the Catholic personalist thought of the period, hurt by the Second World War and the Nazi persecution. The answer that the CC has given to this crisis has led the CC to consider dialogue as a personalist category, because it not only includes the task of communication, but also suggests the cumulative effect of a continuous conversation that leads more and more to true knowledge.⁴

Vatican II “was the first in the history of the church to address specifically the question of the relations of the church with other religions, resulting in the declaration *Nostra aetate*.”⁵ Starting from Vatican II the Church has been increasingly committed to interreligious dialogue, as is confirmed not only in the documents of the council, especially *Nostra aetate* (NA) but also in

⁴ See Damian Howard, S.J., “Rischio e resistenza: cinquant’anni di dialogo interreligioso nella Chiesa Cattolica,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 166/3649 (January 3, 2015): 34-36.

⁵ Archbishop Michael Louis Fitzgerald, M.Afr., “Vatican II and Interfaith Dialogue,” in *Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives*, ed. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3.

most subsequent documents of the magisterium by the popes, the bishops, and documents created by different organisms of the Vatican.

There is, of course no doubt, as is noted by Daniele Racca, an Italian academic focused on Vatican II, that any consideration of the relationship between Christianity and religions in the contemporary magisterium must take as a basis Vatican II. The conciliar documents represent real innovative steps. The post-conciliar magisterium is important for the rooting of some barely sketched principles in the documents of Vatican II and the attempt to harmonize among them all seemingly contradictory aspects.⁶

Since God has chosen to communicate with man and woman, even the Church dialogues with the world, and not only that, but also with the religions with which it coexists. It is not, therefore, a renunciation of its mission to bring Christ to the world, but rather to set up this essential task in the same act of God.⁷ Following this understanding, according to Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, known as a bridge-builder between Catholics and Muslims, *NA* “begins by taking cognizance of the growing sense of unity of the whole of humankind, the growth of a ‘global village’ in which the followers of different religions live side by side.”⁸ The inevitable relationship among these people would be essentially one of dialogue consistent with dialogue among its own members, with other fellow Christians, as well as with the world at large, which contains obviously Jews and Muslims.

In a general sense *NA* declares that “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets

⁶ See Daniele Racca, “Il dialogo interreligioso nel Magistero dopo il Concilio Vaticano II,” *Rassegna di Teologia* 43/4 (2002): 535-536.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fitzgerald, “Vatican II and Interfaith Dialogue,” 4.

forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men [and women]” (*NA* 2). In the specific case of Muslims, on the other hand, *NA* declares that the Church regards with esteem the Muslims and invites “her sons [and daughters], that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men [and women]” (*NA* 3).

Throughout the last decades, indeed, Muslim-Christian dialogue has grown, touching multiple and different areas of life, from doctrinal to social, from philosophical to legal issues. In this sense, *NA* after almost 51 years since its proclamation maintains its importance and continues to be a significant guide for interreligious dialogue with other religions, and regarding this project, with Islam. A guide not only for Catholics but also for Muslims: “Muslims have every reason to welcome and celebrate the *Nostra aetate* as a major leap toward the reinforcement of religious pluralism.... *Nostra aetate* has clearly identified a natural alliance between the Abrahamic faiths and other religious communities.”⁹

It follows that the Council wanted to welcome the rich biblical, patristic, liturgical, and spiritual tradition of the Church and, on the other hand, made the Church available to listen to man and woman with all their history, joys, and sorrows, in order to take to him and her effectively the proclamation of the Gospel. This action of listening simultaneously to God and to man and woman, follows a style that combines clarity of judgment and testimony of truth, an

⁹ Sayyid M. Syeed, “Why Muslims Celebrate *Nostra Aetate*,” in *Nostra Aetate: Celebrating 50 Years of the Catholic Church’s Dialogue with Jews and Muslims*, ed. Pim Valkenberg et al. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 125-127.

attitude of listening and dialogue, encouragement, and evangelical discernment.¹⁰ An attitude of openness and willingness to listen and to cooperate are not enough alone, as dialogue in fact tends to in-depth knowledge of the other, and therefore must be prepared properly, “this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues” (NA 4).

According to Vatican II, in the final analysis, the Church in the world has a specific role, which places it among people to dialogue as an active and privileged subject of the search for truth. The main outcome is that consistent with Vatican II the dialogue has essentially two main purposes. First, a mutual understanding between Christians and non-Christians; knowledge of the other, the one who thinks differently, the one who lives in religious systems other than the Christian one, in order to discover what is good, true, and holy, and being able to participate in a climate of exchange and collaborative evaluation by Christians of the good and of the truth present in other religions. And second, a collaboration for the promotion of authentic values in human society, that is, contribution to the promotion and building of a more just society and more relevant to the plan willed by God, although in different degrees of awareness, a task that unites the Christian believer to all believers and to all men and women of good will.¹¹

2. Interreligious Dialogue in the Post-Vatican II Era

Application of the council insights on religions in general and interreligious dialogue in particular has had a long journey. Theological reflections and new approaches are always developing and having a significant effect also on the missiology of the Church. To understand

¹⁰ See Walter Kasper, “Il cristianesimo nel dialogo con le religioni,” *Rassegna di Teologia* 52/1 (2011): 5-17.

¹¹ See Racca, “Il dialogo interreligioso nel Concilio,” 652-653, 661.

the adaptation of the council in the post-conciliar era I review some more significant documents of the magisterium. In the post-conciliar magisterium, Paul VI clearly expresses the condition of incompleteness of religions compared to the mystery of Christ as it is announced by the CC, in the claims of *Evangelii nuntiandi* (EN):

We wish to point out ... that neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ. On the contrary the Church holds that these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ - riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God.... Even in the face of natural religious expressions most worthy of esteem, the Church finds support in the fact that the religion of Jesus, which she proclaims through evangelization, objectively places man [and woman] in relation with the plan of God, with His living presence and with His action.... In other words, our religion effectively establishes with God an authentic and living relationship which the other religions do not succeed in doing, even though they have, as it were, their arms stretched out towards heaven (EN 53).

Racca finds this statement quite severe for it gives little space to the optimistic view of the non-Christian religions, which fail to establish an authentic and living relationship with God. This expression, however, is mitigated by n. 55, which recognizes in the modern world, even in the religions, the presence of “real steppingstones to Christianity, and of evangelical values”: it must be admitted that these elements establish a real connection with God.¹²

Regarding John Paul II's 1990 *Redemptoris missio* (RM), then, the new consideration of religious pluralism from the conciliar vision has a significant role because the Holy Spirit is in action in the religious traditions and because of the mediation of Christ and, in him, the Church.

¹² Racca, “Il dialogo interreligioso nel Concilio,” 517.

In connection with this emphasis *RM*, for the first time since Vatican II, affirms that the Church is the ordinary way of salvation: “Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (*RM* 55). In this context, interreligious dialogue comes up as part of the mission of the Church as “the papal magisterium on the mission came affirming the indispensable centrality of the ecclesial mediation and originally Christological truth and salvation.”¹³

In *DP*, one can notice the same emphasis. In this document, which offers points of reference to help Christians to have respect for the believers of other religions, while remaining faithful to the need to proclaim the Gospel, in the first place is emphasized the “fullness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ” (*DP* 32). The document underscores the fact that interreligious dialogue does not exclude the evangelizing action of the Church, although this is explained through the specificity of each of the two actions, that is, dialogue and evangelization, and their possible interaction. The document is divided into two parts: the first is dedicated to dialogue, the second to the proclamation of the Gospel.

According to the document, among the members of other religious traditions and the Church there is a customary rapport that is explained in two ways. First, the Church is the “sacrament in which the Kingdom of God is present ‘in mystery,’” which signifies that, if the members of other religious traditions “already share in some way in the reality which is signified by the Kingdom,” then they are also in relation with the Church. Second, if it is true that “the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the church,” it will certainly find its

¹³ Alberto Cozzi, “Le religioni nel Magistero postconciliare: problemi ermeneutici,” *Teologia* 28/3 (2002): 294.

“completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come” (DP 35).

DP, also mentions, without setting a hierarchy of priorities among them, four main forms of dialogue:

- a. The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.
- b. The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
- c. The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.
- d. The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values (DP 42).

The four forms of dialogue are linked to each other, and relate to human development and culture: the choice of any one of them depends on the concrete situation in which Christian communities and individual Christians are to live and the opportunities they offer. DP, warns, however, that there might be always a risk that one could lose sight of this variety of forms of dialogue: “Were it to be reduced to theological exchange, dialogue might easily be taken as a sort of luxury item in the church's mission, a domain reserved for specialists.” Theological exchange is very important but it should not be considered as the unique way to dialogue. Because the different forms are interconnected, contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values, as they may also eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience in response to the great

questions which the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people (see DP 43).

The post-synodal apostolic exhortations of John Paul II about Africa and Asia give thought-provoking insights. The first, in chronological order, while on the one hand emphasizes again respect for the values in the non-Christian religious traditions and the need for cooperation with the followers of other religions in order to reach all together a desired human promotion and development, on the other hand reaffirms the concept of salvation in Christ alone, and the fact that that salvation can reach even those who have not known him:

It is true that people of upright heart who, through no fault of their own have not been reached by the proclamation of the Gospel but who live in harmony with their conscience according to God's law, will be saved by Christ and in Christ. For every human being there is always an actual call from God, which is waiting to be acknowledged and received (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). It is precisely in order to facilitate this recognition and acceptance that Christ's disciples are required not to rest until the Good News of salvation has been brought to all.... The Name of Jesus Christ is the only one by which it has been decreed that we can be saved (cf. Acts 4:12).¹⁴

Regarding Muslim-Christian dialogue, “commitment to dialogue must also embrace all Muslims of good will. Christians cannot forget that many Muslims try to imitate the faith of Abraham and to live the demands of the Decalogue.”¹⁵ Starting from the belief that the Living God, Creator of heaven and earth and the Lord of history, is the Father of the one great human family, the Synod encourages us to work together for human progress and development at all levels ... and to join together in the service of life in justice and peace. According to the Synod

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* [Post-synodal apostolic exhortation], September 14, 1995, nn. 73-74, www.vatican.va.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, n. 66.

Muslim-Christian dialogue should respect on both sides the principle of religious freedom with all that this involves, also including external and public manifestations of faith. It follows that “Christians and Muslims are called to commit themselves to promoting a dialogue free from the risks of false irenicism or militant fundamentalism, and to raising their voices against unfair policies and practices, as well as against the lack of reciprocity in matters of religious freedom.”¹⁶

Regarding the exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, the two principal points of the document are the recognition of the richness and depth of religious traditions born in Asia and the assertion that the Christian revelation has a character that makes it unique.¹⁷ The exhortation, however, presents a broad view of interreligious dialogue with religions present in Asia, which is “the cradle of the world’s major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism,”¹⁸ and where

in the thirteenth century the Good News was announced to the Mongols and the Turks and to the Chinese once more. But Christianity almost vanished in these regions for a number of reasons, among them the rise of Islam, geographical isolation, the absence of an appropriate adaptation to local cultures, and perhaps above all a lack of preparedness to encounter the great religions of Asia.¹⁹

John Paul II underscores that from the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, an expression of the mission to others. In the same pattern as the aforementioned exhortations, the pontiff points out the firm belief that the fullness of salvation

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Racca, “Il dialogo interreligioso nel Concilio,” 521.

¹⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 6.

¹⁹ Ibid., n. 9.

comes from Christ alone and that the Church community to which they belong is the ordinary means of salvation. The Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in other religious traditions as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people. Christians involved in interreligious dialogue with other religions should keep in mind the duty of proclaiming Jesus Christ who is the way and the truth and the life, the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.

A “genuine” interreligious dialogue requires agents “with a mature and convinced Christian faith,”²⁰ therefore “only Christians who are deeply immersed in the mystery of Christ and who are happy in their faith community can without undue risk and with hope of positive fruit engage in interreligious dialogue.”²¹ There is a “need for a dialogue of life and heart, run by those followers of Christ who are gentle and humble of heart like their Master, never proud, never condescending, as they meet their partners in dialogue.”²² It follows that the way of an authentic interreligious dialogue passes through a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen, and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences.

The Church needs to look forward continuously to find new ways of interreligious dialogue along with scholarly exchanges between experts in the various religious traditions or representatives of those traditions, plus common action for integral human development and the defense of human and religious values, already undertaken. Interreligious dialogue is not only an academic or social activity but needs to be fed and revitalized by the prayers and contemplation of consecrated men and women as well as by their asceticism and mysticism: “religious men and women, without abandoning their own traditions, can still commit themselves to praying and

²⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

working for peace and the good of humanity. The Church must continue to strive to preserve and foster at all levels this spirit of encounter and cooperation between religions.”²³

The path of interreligious dialogue with Benedict XVI sees new horizons in the combination of interreligious dialogue with intercultural dialogue. Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Ratzinger, had written, indeed, that “in all known historical cultures, religion is an essential element of culture, is indeed its determinative center; it is religion that determines the scale of values and, thereby, the inner cohesion and hierarchy of all these cultures.”²⁴ Consequently, Benedict XVI, reformulating his previous reflections on the interactions between religion and culture, introduces a further dimension by combining interreligious dialogue with intercultural dialogue based on the fact that culture has a close connection with religion, which “makes possible to expand the horizon of human understanding, giving access to the knowledge of a greater and deeper truth.”²⁵

In the understanding of Benedict XVI, interreligious dialogue is intrinsic to religions, as a vocation and a task, but then projects out of them as a destination of their meeting and as a way to lead the religions themselves to the realization of their mission in history. In this perspective, interreligious dialogue would arise as a premise that indicates the conditions and identifies a kind of shared ethical and cultural platform whereby humanity might live peacefully in the cultivation of all that is genuinely human, and each religion would perform its mission in full legality and freedom. As for the promoters of interreligious dialogue, the promotion and protection of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 59.

²⁵ See Bishop Mariano Crociata, “Ermeneutica del dialogo interreligioso a cinquant’anni dal Concilio Vaticano II.” Prolusione per il nuovo anno accademico Istituto Teologico Salernitano, October 7, 2013, 7, <http://www.marianocrociata.it/>.

religious values in a plural society constitutes an indispensable aspect of dialogue, along with the care of the inherent religious sense of humans.²⁶

The pontificate of Francis has so far seen attention given to interreligious dialogue, both through meetings and gestures that accompanied it and his speeches that have confirmed and strengthened the commitment of the CC, as was hoped in the beginning of his pontificate: “We can expect a renewed emphasis on dialogue as central to Catholic identity, which was defined by Vatican II fifty years ago. It will be a dialogue that not only listens and seeks mutual understanding, but also a dialogue oriented towards alleviating the problems of poverty, distribution of wealth, and other threats to peace.”²⁷ In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (EG), Francis speaks of interreligious dialogue as a necessary condition for peace in the world and refers to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation. Emphasizing the importance of dialogue, and the necessary conditions for Muslim-Christian dialogue, as well as their significant presence in many traditionally Christian countries, the pontiff points out that “many of them also have a deep conviction that their life, in its entirety, is from God and for God. They also acknowledge the need to respond to God with an ethical commitment and with mercy towards those most in need.” Therefore, “in order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable training is essential for all involved, not only so that they can be solidly and joyfully grounded in their own identity, but so that they can also acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed light on shared beliefs” (EG 251-253).

In his address to the plenary session of the PCID, the pontiff points out that the CC is conscious of the value of the promotion of friendship and respect between men and women of

²⁶ See Ibid., 8.

²⁷ John Borelli, “In the Footsteps of John XXIII: Pope Francis and the Embodiment of Vatican II,” *E-International Relations*, May 16, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/05/16/in-the-footsteps-of-john-xxiii-pope-francis-and-the-embodiment-of-vatican-ii/>.

different religious traditions: “We are increasingly aware of its importance, both because the world has, in some ways, become ‘smaller,’ and because the phenomenon of migration increases contact between people and communities of different traditions, cultures and religions. This fact calls to our Christian conscience and it is a challenge for the understanding of faith and for the real life ... of many believers.” “The future is in respectful co-existence in diversity,” concludes the pontiff, “not in the uniformity of a single theoretically neutral thought. The recognition of the fundamental right to religious freedom, in all its dimensions, therefore becomes indispensable. In this regard, great efforts have been made to express the magisterium of the church during recent decades. We are convinced that this is the route to building peace in the world.”²⁸

Speaking at an ecumenical and interreligious meeting in Sarajevo in 2015, Francis points out that “interreligious dialogue cannot be limited merely to the few, to leaders of religious communities, but must also extend as far as possible to all believers, engaging the different sectors of civil society.” Another point that Francis underscores is about the identity of parties involved in interreligious dialogue: “It is always worth remembering, however, that for dialogue to be authentic and effective, it presupposes a solid identity: without an established identity, dialogue is of no use or even harmful.”²⁹

In particular, Muslim-Christian dialogue requires patience and humility accompanied by detailed study, as approximation and improvisation can be counterproductive or even the cause of unease and embarrassment. There is a need for lasting and continuous commitment in order to ensure we do not find ourselves unprepared in various situations and in different contexts. For this reason, it demands a specific preparation, that is not limited to sociological analysis but

²⁸ Francis, “Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue,” November 28, 2013, www.vatican.va.

²⁹ Francis, “Address of the Holy Father,” Apostolic Journey to Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Ecumenical and Interreligious Meeting, Franciscan Intern. Study Centre, June 6, 2015, www.vatican.va.

rather has the characteristics of a journey shared by people belonging to religions that, although in different ways, refer to the spiritual fatherhood of Abraham. Culture and education are not secondary to a true process of moving toward each other that respects in every person “his life, his physical integrity, his dignity and the rights deriving from that dignity, his reputation, his property, his ethnic and cultural identity, his ideas and his political choices.”³⁰

After showing in general terms, the meaning, foundations, and theoretical development of the Church’s commitment to dialogue, at this point we are ready to observe its projection in the Church’s life, and to look forward to the coordinates of this dissertation which are the context of Turkey, a secular and Muslim country, and its Christian Catholic presence, which is very small in numbers.

B) Turkey and Major Actors of Muslim-Christian Dialogue

One of Francis’ first apostolic visits was to Turkey. As usually happens, at the invitation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople for the feast of St. Andrew, Francis went to Turkey in 2014 and, as is traditionally done in Papal visits, he also visited the Republic of Turkey’s authorities, as well as the president of the Diyanet. His first words to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (hereinafter President Erdoğan) and other authorities gave the coordinates of interreligious dialogue’s journey between Vatican and Turkey.

It brings me great joy to have this opportunity to pursue with you a dialogue of friendship, esteem and respect, in the footsteps of my predecessors Blessed Paul VI, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI. This dialogue was prepared for and supported by the work of the then

³⁰ Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Sponsored by the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies on The 50th Anniversary of its Establishment in Rome,” January 24, 2015, www.vatican.va.

Apostolic Delegate, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, who went on to become Saint John XXIII, and by the Second Vatican Council.³¹

This long journey based on reciprocal friendship, esteem, and respect, initiated by Roncalli with all its ups and downs, has been enriched by marks of the just-mentioned pontiffs. It is also remarkable that the one who initiated this dialogue with Turkey, also initiated Vatican II, whose declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, *NA*, establishes the fundamentals of the Muslim-Christian dialogue. In this section, therefore, I first present the history of Turkey founded in 1923 on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. By focusing on some significant points of its foundation I aim to present the origins of its struggles in terms of secularism and religiosity. Then I present major partners of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey, which are the Diyanet, a small presence of the Latin Catholic Church with an officially non-recognized legal status, and finally a controversial religious leader, Fethullah Gülen and his Hizmet Movement. The study of the characteristics of these partners will provide points through which to present in the final chapter the challenges of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey. In this section, a particular emphasis is given to Papal visits, and to the speeches and statements released during these visits by both the pontiffs and the presidents of the Diyanet.

1. Turkey: a “Secular” and “Muslim” Country

Turkey is one of the major Muslim countries. Having a small part of its territory in Europe, over the Bosphorus Strait, Turkey is considered a bridge between Orient and Occident not only geopolitically but also socio-culturally. The massive peninsula, called by the Romans Asia

³¹ Francis, “Incontro con le autorità,” in *Nella fede e nella carità: viaggio apostolico in Turchia (28-30 Novembre 2014)* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014), 7-8.

Minor, has acted as a crucible of the rotation of peoples and civilizations which formed the basis for the current Republic of Turkey. The surface of Turkey is about 814,500 sq. km. - of which ninety-seven percent is located in Asia and three percent in Europe. Turkey borders Greece and Bulgaria in the European area, and Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq and Syria in its Asian part, with Cyprus on its south, an island divided into two independent countries of which the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Turkey.

According to İřtar B. Gözaydın, a Turkish professor of law and politics, whose focus is on the relations between religion and state in modern Turkey, “within the context of the worldwide resurgence of religion, Turkey constitutes a sociologically illuminating and theoretically challenging case.”³² The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, whose state and social life were governed by Islamic religious dictates. As another Turkish academic and expert of Islamic & Middle Eastern studies, Ahmet T. Kuru, said, the “ancient régime” of Turkey depended on the Ottoman monarchy; the hegemony of Islam as the Islamic law was in use in the Ottoman empire; the *ulema* were an important element of the state structure as the Ottoman sultans claimed to be the caliphs of all Muslims.³³ The Ottoman Empire before its fall, in the XVIII-XIX centuries, thanks to the strategies used by the major European powers, underwent an internal evolution³⁴ whereby even non-religious structures, such as civil courts and secular schools, had begun to play an important role in law and education along with the Islamic structures. This change has meant that until the formation of modern Turkey, there was the presence of both religious and non-religious elements.³⁵

³² İřtar B. Gözaydın, “Religion, Politics, and the Politics of Religion in Turkey,” 161.

³³ See Ahmet T. Kuru, “Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles, and State Policies toward Religion,” *World Politics* 59/4 (2007): 588.

³⁴ Giovanni Sale, *Stati islamici e minoranze cristiane* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2008), 22.

³⁵ Nilüfer Narlı, “Türkiye’de laikliğin konumu,” *Cogito* 1/1 (1994): 24.

Atatürk, the western-minded latitudinarian founder of modern Turkey, made many reforms in the judicial system and education, and created a new state structure, not based on religion but on the principle of secularism, and the nation-state was established. While Atatürk opposed the influence of Islam and other religions on the public sphere, the Islamists sought to maintain Islam's hegemonic status. At the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the first article in its constitution of 1921 stated soundly that "sovereignty belongs unconditionally to the Nation," and the following article declared that "the religion of the Turkish state is Islam."³⁶ The *Kemalists*³⁷ abolished the caliphate, and substituted the Islamic law by adopting different European codes such as the Italian criminal code, the German commercial code and the Swiss civil code. The properties of pious foundations were expropriated, all Madrasas closed down, education was brought under the state control, and the alphabet was Latinized "therefore throughout the 1930s there remained almost no institution in Turkey that could legally provide education of Islam."³⁸

One of the significant *Kemalist* reforms was outlawing *tariqah*. In the *Nutuk*, his eloquent six-day-speech, Atatürk declared that the outlawing of the *tariqah* was necessary "in order to prove that our nation as a whole was no primitive nation, filled with superstitions and prejudices."³⁹ As one can see nowadays, however, in practice, "the ban circumscribed rather than eradicated the activities of the *tariqah* by forcing them underground."⁴⁰ All these reforms made

³⁶ Ahmet Hadi Adanalı, "The Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Principle of Secularism in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 98 (April/July 2008): 228.

³⁷ *Kemalist* – an adherent of *Kemalism* which refers to a set of ideas based on the thought of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the founder of modern Turkey, as well as to the official ideology of Turkey's single-party period.

³⁸ Kuru, "Passive and Assertive Secularism," 589.

³⁹ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *The Great Speech* (Ankara: Atatürk Research Center, 2003), 714.

⁴⁰ Gareth Jenkins, *Political Islam in Turkey: Running West, Heading East?* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 96.

of the new-born-Turkey a “strictly temporal state,”⁴¹ which found its better expression in its founding father Atatürk’s well-known statement: “We get our inspirations not from the heavens or invisible things but directly from life.”⁴²

In 1937, after “the provision concerning the state religion (Islam) in the constitution prevailing at the time was abolished in 1928,”⁴³ the *Kemalists* added the principle of *laiklik* to the constitution to seal their reforms,⁴⁴ this principle has been kept throughout subsequent decades. “Atatürk’s policy on *laïcité*,” according to Gözaydın, “was to remove religion from the public realm and reduce it to a matter of the faith and practice of the individual, so that the principle of freedom of religion was to protect ‘individualized religion’ only.”⁴⁵ This policy aimed basically to keep religion in the personal domain and to require state intervention insofar as it concerned and objectified the social order.

Regarding the notions of “secularism” and “*laïcité*,” Turkey’s case shows some particularity. Called in Turkish as *laiklik*, this principle promotes “not only a separation between religion and state,” but also a kind of “bureaucratization of religion under state control.”⁴⁶ Consistent with Gözaydın, indeed, “*laïcité/laicism/laic* is used for the state’s control of religion in the public sphere as opposed to secularism, which implies the separation of state and religion; and *laiklik (laïcité)* is the concept that is preferred by Turkey’s Republican decision-making elite in all legislation and other legal regulations which actually shape up its substance.”⁴⁷ This explains

⁴¹ İftar B. Gözaydın, “Diyanet and Politics,” *The Muslim World* 98 (April/July 2008): 217.

⁴² Atatürk, *The Great Speech*, 389.

⁴³ Gözaydın, “Diyanet and Politics,” 218.

⁴⁴ See Kuru, “Passive and Assertive Secularism,” 589.

⁴⁵ Gözaydın, “Diyanet and Politics,” 217.

⁴⁶ Chiara Maritato, “Reassessing Women, Religion and the Turkish Secular State in the Light of the Professionalization of Female Preachers (Vaizeler) in Istanbul,” *Religion, State and Society* 44/3 (2016): 259.

⁴⁷ Gözaydın, “Religion, Politics, and the Politics of Religion in Turkey,” 8.

well a question that is usually posed regarding the division between “laics” and “Islamists” in Turkey. The answer to the question comes from Jean-Marc Balhan, a Belgian Jesuit who for a decade has been living and working in the country: “In the *Kemalist* mentality, the State, in order not to be potentially controlled by religion, must control it; for religion would have been responsible for the backward state of the country, it must be reformed and marginalized to give place to the sciences and a national culture.”⁴⁸

Modern Turkey in its constitution, promulgated in 1982 after the third military coup in its history, is declared a democratic, laic, social republic, governed by law. The constitution establishes the equality of all citizens before the law without distinction of opinion or religion and freedom of worship, religion, and thought. It also affirms the superiority of law, and the principle of non-retroactivity of criminal law and the prohibition of the denial of justice. In addition, the constitution enshrines the right to health care. The national public education law promulgated in 1924 entrusts to the State the full responsibility of education of its citizens including the compulsory teaching of religion and the establishment of Divinity Schools (*İlahiyat Fakülteleri*) as well as religious high schools (*İmam Hatip Liseleri*). By virtue of the secular state solemnly declared in the constitution it would be expected that in Turkey there is a clear distinction between the political and religious spheres. Actually, “in fact, Turkish secularism, despite the efforts made in the recent past, has little in common with the so-called separation of Church and state in the political sphere, promoted by Enlightenment and liberal doctrine,”⁴⁹ to which religion, despite being separated from the state sphere, is still under State control.

As one can see after the founding of the Republic of Turkey, the legal and education system in Turkey, although *à la turque*, has acquired a secular character, and as Turkish professor of

⁴⁸ Jean-Marc Balhan, S.J., “La Turquie et ses minorités,” *Études* 411/12 (2009): 596.

⁴⁹ Sale, *Stati islamici e minoranze cristiane*, 6.

medical ethics and history of medicine Berna Arda says, “in this context it is evident that legal regulations in medicine are secular in spirit and content.”⁵⁰ As in any democratic and secular system, also in Turkey the promulgation of laws takes into account the cultural, social, and religious elements of its citizens. In fact, all these features have only an indirect influence on the promulgated laws:

As should generally be appreciated, secularism has a great influence on legislation and on the world view of a society in bioethics. For that reason, religious edicts have no direct impact on legislative regulations in Turkey. Such edicts only become necessary when popular support is needed in the context of new medical developments in general.... If the state is not secular, morality, art and the system of values lacks secular criteria. In other words, secularism is the name of not only a political system but all social systems. Secular social order means that public order, namely the area of life in which all citizens have the right to participate equally, cannot be based on any religious dogma, which means that religion renounces the claim of governing society.⁵¹

Kemalist principles and reforms, unfortunately, could not expand to the whole Turkish nation. Throughout the decades following the foundation of the Turkish Republic, society has seen a kind of oscillation between two cohabitant spirits or conceptions of life in the country. Well-known Turkish academic Metin Heper’s analysis in this regard is quite accurate:

[O]n one side is a secular life with its freedoms as well as insecurities while, on the other, is a religious life with its uncertainties accompanied by strict controls. Those in the secularist camp are troubled by the “fact” that a significant part of the population in Turkey does not think the way they do, and are not convinced by the assurances of those in the Islamist camp

⁵⁰ Berna Arda, “The Importance of Secularism in Medical Ethics: The Turkish Example,” *RBM Online* 14 (2007): 26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

that if the latter capture power they will respect the secularists' life styles. Consequently, the secularists are hostile to virtually anything that smacks of Islam. In turn, those in the Islamist camp have lost all hope that the secularists will eventually accept them into their fold, and, as a result, have adopted an equally uncompromising attitude: they equate the recent revival of Islam in Turkey as no less than "a river coming back to its own bed."⁵²

This analysis made in 2001, describes very well the social-political atmosphere and explains the main reasons that brought the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, hereinafter AKP) headed by current President Erdoğan to the government of the country in 2002 and still keeps it in power. AKP, which has its origins partially in the reform of the preceding pro-Islamist *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party), by persistently rejecting being labeled an Islamist party, defines itself as a democratic conservative party. Even though President Erdoğan and other top leaders of the party have sustained to embrace the whole Turkish society, it primarily represents those who are in the Islamist camp mentioned by Heper, and who had been considering themselves discriminated against by secularists because of their religious feelings and public expression of their faith in the society, e.g., the use of a headscarf. AKP in its very first years of power brought forward many reforms demanded by the EU, the so-called "Copenhagen criteria," and consequently was seen as a model of democracy for all other countries with a Muslim majority. The legal and institutional liberalization reforms asked by EU diminished considerably the military interference and restricted the range of options for military commands, which were seen as an obstacle to democracy.

This polarization of society, however, did not really help to pursue the reforms. In Balhan's analysis, the *Kemalist* panel obstructed these "democratic openings" in the name of its Unitarian

⁵² Metin Heper, review of *Turkey Today: A Nation Divided over Islam's Revival*, by Marvine Howe, *Middle East Journal* 55/1 (2001): 146.

and nationalist, *sécuritaire* and *dirigiste* vision, for fear of losing its ascendancy over the country and being invaded by a “retrograde” culture. On the other hand, the conservative AKP in government, even when it launched some reforms, supported and promoted by the EU, tended to distill them only drop by drop, to spare the conservative fringe of its electorate and ensure its own survival as state guards.⁵³ In the current situation in Turkey there is a religious revival in every area of social life, along with an ongoing authoritarianism accelerated by the measures taken, and the state of emergency declared by the government following the failed coup.

2. The Diyanet

The symbolic institution of the said “laic” character of Turkish Republic is the Diyanet which was established by Law art. 429 of 1924 which separates religious affairs from those of the state. In fact, this law, to defend the secular state, has founded a system of religion depending on the government on which the administration of religious affairs depends. The Diyanet is a “secular/laic”⁵⁴ administrative unit in the Republic of Turkey. Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish writer and journalist, finds that “this institution, a bit like the Church of England, is the state-sponsored official religious body in Turkey. And its head is the supreme Muslim religious authority for the nation.”⁵⁵ Established after the end of the Islamic caliphate, the Diyanet is in charge of “directing what is related to the beliefs, worship, ethics of Islam, enlightening society on matters of

⁵³ See Balhan, “La Turquie et ses minorités,” 603.

⁵⁴ İftar B. Gözaydın, “Management of Religion in Turkey: The Diyanet and Beyond,” in *Freedom of Religion and Belief in Turkey*, eds. Özgür Heval Çınar and Mine Yıldırım (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 16.

⁵⁵ Mustafa Akyol, “The Mitre Meets the Turban: The Pope and Dr. Bardakoğlu,” *Turkish Daily News*, November 30, 2006, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-mitre-meets-the-turban-the-pope-and-dr-bardakoglu.aspx?pageID=438&n=the-mitre-meets-the-turban-the-pope-and-dr-bardakoglu-2006-11-30>.

religion, and administering sacred places of worship” (art.1, Law 429/1924).⁵⁶ This law abolished The Ministries of *Şer'iyye ve Evkaf* (Religious Affairs and Pious Foundations) and substituted it with this new administrative unit. As Gözaydın writes,

Not to place the institution of “religion” in a political body was a key part of the overall policy of the founding political decision-making elite of Turkey who wished to establish a secular state and to transform society into a modern one. They did not want to have a unit within the cabinet dealing with religious affairs. Instead, by assigning religious affairs to an administrative unit, the ruling elite both took religion under their control and at the same time tried to break the potentially sacred significance of the Diyanet.⁵⁷

In this way, the *Kemalists* tried to nationalize religion and to place orthodox Islam under the newly created secular state’s control. In order to reach this double-edged purpose, they pursued decidedly “establishing secular systems of law and education, destroying the influence and power of the *ulema* (scholars of religion) within the state administration, banning the unorthodox Sufi orders, and outlawing the use of religious speech, propaganda or organization for political purposes.”⁵⁸

In time, Article 154 of the 1961 Constitution of Turkey provided that the Diyanet was incorporated in the general administration to discharge the function prescribed by a special law, act no. 633, which redefined its task in terms of “conducting the affairs of belief, worship and enlightening society on religious matters and the moral aspects of the Islamic religion.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Maritato, “Reassessing Women, Religion and the Turkish Secular State,” 259.

⁵⁷ Gözaydın, “Management of Religion in Turkey,” 16; see also John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, vol. 2, s.v. “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı,” (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 86.

⁵⁸ Gözaydın, “Diyanet and Politics,” 217.

⁵⁹ Gözaydın, “Religion, Politics, and the Politics of Religion in Turkey,” 29.

Introduction of such an act signifies that the state preferred to use the organization as an ideological tool, which is clearly incompatible with the notion of a secular state and goes against the original intent of Atatürk and his entourage. Finally, “the attempt to create a moral order based on Islamic values by state apparatus” was fortified by art. 136 of the 1982 Constitution, by which the Diyanet was designed to carry out its mission within the framework of the principle of *laiklik* and with the purpose of achieving national solidarity and integrity.⁶⁰

The fact that especially in Sunni Islam there is no official clergy,⁶¹ and in the case of Turkey there is an absence of a legally defined Muslim community, is one of the reasons to legitimize the intervention of the state in religion since the state classifies religion as a public service, and consequently the state’s activities in religious affairs, such as the management of mosques, formation of imams, or correct publications of Quran are generally not seen as something against secularist principles.⁶² Today, after more than ninety years, the Diyanet is still the main institution responsible for running a wide range of aforementioned religious services, and consistent with Ahmet Hadi Adanalı, Senior Advisor at the Office of the Prime Minister of Turkey, “it survived difficult times, enjoyed opportunities, and experienced various legal changes. It has become an institution that is severely criticized, passionately defended and delicately handled.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., 29-30.

⁶¹ According to Ali Bardakoğlu, the former President of the Diyanet, however, keeping present some historical facts, “the absence of clergy in Islam means that there is no special class equipped with holy abilities to speak on behalf of God and religion. Yet, since the early days of the Prophet, there have been imams and religious officials who render religious services and administer practices of worship in society. The idea that suggests that there is no clergy in Islam is a higher, more theological idea that pertains to the origins of theology and the message conveyed by religion in the world.” Ali Bardakoğlu, “The Structure, Mission and Social Function of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA),” *The Muslim Word* 98 (April/July 2008): 174.

⁶² Gözaydın, “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı,” 87; “Diyanet and Politics,” 221.

⁶³ Adanalı, “The Presidency of Religious Affairs,” 229.

Today, the Diyanet directly manages all the mosques in Turkey and their salaried officials such as imams, Quran instructors, muezzins, and other religious workers, all of whom as civil servants get their salaries from the State. And throughout the decades it became a monster that drains the Turkish economy as its budget in the year 2015 exceeded the individual budgets of seven ministries, namely, the Ministries of Culture and Tourism, Economy, Development, Environment and Urbanization, Foreign Affairs, Health and Energy and Natural Resources, and the total of the budgets of three ministries (Development, Economy, Environment and Urbanization) combined.

Since its foundation until the years preceding the military coup of 1980, access to the Diyanet had been limited to Turkey's Muslims. After 1980, however, the Diyanet expanded its activities into Germany, France, Netherlands, and other countries with major Turkish immigrant populations. The Diyanet's role in international affairs, however, is not limited to Turkish migrants, but it also plays a role as an actor in those countries. Presently, the Diyanet is a significant actor in the international arena thanks to the Turkish state's financial and organizational support, and sends imams to Europe to protect Turkish Muslims, and "their religious and cultural roots in the face of assimilationist policies that they sometimes encounter,"⁶⁴ and to maintain their loyalty to the Turkish state.⁶⁵

As mentioned above, given its huge structure and derived weight on the Turkish economy, as well as the fragile and dysfunctional relationship between Turkish laicity and religiosity, the Diyanet has been understandably criticized, and remains a lively topic that motivates many

⁶⁴ Mehmet Görmez, "Religion and Secularism in the Modern World: A Turkish Perspective," *SAM Papers* [Center for Strategic Resource] 2 (March 2012): 10-11.

⁶⁵ See Gözaydın, "Religion, Politics, and the Politics of Religion in Turkey," 20; see also Nico Landmann, "Sustaining Turkish-Islamic Loyalties: The Diyanet in Western Europe," in *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, eds. Suha Taji-Farouki et al. (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 214-231.

scholarly debates. Gözaydın finds that “the extensive network of the Diyanet all over Turkey and abroad, which no other administrative body enjoys in the Turkish system, is a great opportunity for all governments, regardless of their positions in the political spectrum.”⁶⁶

The fact that since 1924, the Diyanet has been under the auspices of the office of the Prime Minister, and the president of the institution has been appointed by the President of the Republic of Turkey at the proposal of the Prime Minister, poses another issue, namely, the objectivity of the Diyanet and its presidents. On the other hand, Ali Bardakoğlu, the former President of the Diyanet, in defense of the Diyanet, states that during his presidency the Diyanet “acted totally on its own initiative, its own scholarly competence and accumulation of knowledge and with Turkey’s scholarly capacity.”⁶⁷

Actually, since in Turkey the majority of Muslims are Sunni, and the religious belief propagated by the Turkish government appears closer to the Sunni tradition, there are some concerns related to the principle of equality guaranteed by the constitution. Bardakoğlu holds that “the Diyanet has made considerable institutional contributions to the promotion of religious diversity and the culture of co-existence in Turkey,”⁶⁸ and the current President, Mehmet Görmez adds that “the Directorate undoubtedly acts independently from political authorities and pursues an approach that is above any political and sectarian considerations. The Directorate clearly prefers a prestigious referee position instead of taking sides.”⁶⁹ On the contrary according

⁶⁶ Gözaydın, “Religion, Politics, and the Politics of Religion in Turkey,” 21.

⁶⁷ Bardakoğlu, “The Structure, Mission and Social Function of the Presidency,” 176.

⁶⁸ Ali Bardakoğlu, “Culture of Co-existence in Islam: The Turkish Case,” *Insight Turkey* 10/3 (2008): 121.

⁶⁹ Görmez, “Religion and Secularism in the Modern World,” 11.

to Gözaydın “the Diyanet and its officers or spokespersons have sometimes tended to display hostility towards Alevi and Shiite citizens.”⁷⁰

Another critique concerns the relationships of other religious minorities such as Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Bahá'ís, or Jehovah Witnesses with the Diyanet and their representability there. The issue provokes many questions such as: Would there be separate departments under the Diyanet for those non-Islamic belief groups? If so, would they depend on the President of the Diyanet? Would Catholics and Orthodox especially, who have their own clerical hierarchy want to be represented by the Diyanet?

Regarding the teaching of the Diyanet, especially in these last years, the directorate has made headlines on a number of recent occasions because some moral interpretations that the directorate made hurt the sensibility of many and created some social indignation. Just to give some examples, to a question posed by an anonymous believer whether his marriage would be void or not if he lusts for his own daughter, an unidentified religious scholar of Diyanet responded that “There is a difference of opinion on the matter among Islam’s different schools of thought. For some, a father kissing his daughter with lust or caressing her with desire has no effect on the man’s marriage.” Moreover, after some colorful and graphic details about girls’ attire, he suggested, “The girl should be over nine years of age.” Several women’s groups have demanded that Diyanet stop obsessing about women’s bodies and sexuality and instead focus on corruption, bribery, rape, sexual harassment, children’s rights, murder of women, poverty, and hunger.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Gözaydın, “Diyanet and Politics,” 223.

⁷¹ Cf. Pinar Tremblay, “Incest Fatwa Lands Turkish Religious Directorate in Hot Water,” *Al-Monitor*, January 15, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/turkey-religious-affairs-directorate-fatwa.html>. See also Giovanni Masini, “Una fatwa scuote la Turchia: così viene incitata la pedofilia,” *Il*

3. Presence of the Latin Catholic Church and Vatican-Turkish Relationships

According to Buğra Poyraz, a young Turkish Catholic historian, among all the Christian Churches of the Ottoman Empire and of the modern Turkish Republic, the Roman Catholic Church or the Catholic Church of the Latin rite seemed the most foreign and European one, because of its members and the foreign powers which supported and protected it. The people in question are the Levantines, the Roman Catholics who were the long-term residents of the Ottoman Empire.⁷²

The history of the Latin Catholic community in the Ottoman Empire first and in Turkey later, coincides with developments in Istanbul, previously known as Constantinople. The Levantine community of Constantinople comes from the institution of Italian colonies in the Byzantine Empire for commercial reasons. The number of Latins was augmented by the concession of a district to the Venetians in Constantinople in 1082 by Alexios I Komnenos. At the time of the fourth crusade (1202-1204) which gave origin to the foundation of the Latin Empire of the Orient there were already 1200 churches and 360 monasteries. The Latin community of the Byzantine Empire which had once been destroyed because of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, soon after rebuilt itself around the so-called Ottoman Latins and foreign Latins defined as Levantines. The first, who were Ottoman subjects, had remained in place during the surrender of the Genovese district, and the second, chose to leave the country in order to return later. From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, we are witnessing the apogee of the Latin community of Constantinople, which was characterized by the influx of foreign immigrants who

Giornale, January 9, 2016, <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/mondo/fatwa-scuote-turchia-incesto-bimbe-9-anni-1211589.html>.

⁷² See Buğra Poyraz, *The History of the Church Diplomacy in Turkey: From the Religious Protectorate to the Direct Diplomatic Relations* (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2016), 9.

landed in the Ottoman Empire in search of work and a more prosperous life. All this was motivated and accelerated by the reforms enacted by the Ottomans in 1839, 1856, and 1867 which, among other things, granted to foreigners the right to real property. The apogee of the Latin community coincided with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The measures taken by the Turkish Republic against foreigners accelerated the decline of the foreign community of Constantinople.⁷³

Besides the Latin Catholic Church, other Catholic communities of the eastern rites present in Turkey today, like Armenian Catholics, Assyrian Catholics, and Chaldeans, were born or took their first roots in the Ottoman lands; and other Catholic rites which have no existence today in Turkey, like Maronites, Bulgarian Catholics, and Melkites expanded and survived in the Ottoman lands. Thanks to privileges granted to France through the “Capitulations” or treaties which were stipulated by the Sublime Porte, France could defend the interests of the non-Ottoman Catholic religious men and women or laity, who were especially of Latin rite. The protectorate was given the responsibility of protecting the individuals, but also the Holy Places in Ottoman lands including Jerusalem, and the Catholic institutions like orphanages, hospitals, and schools. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, the power of France as the protector of Catholics started to decline and the limits of this protectorate created very soon an uncertainty, which raised the question of authority before the Sublime Porte for representing the Catholic population and defending their rights. On the other hand, the Holy See was represented by an Apostolic Delegate through a diplomat priest of episcopal rank and he has been unofficially

⁷³ See Rinaldo Marmara, *La Chiesa Latina Cattolica di Costantinopoli: da Bisanzio ad oggi* (Istanbul: Latin Katolik Ruhani Reisliği, 2011).

recognized as the representative of the Pope, but not as the supreme Catholic authority over the Catholic presence in the Ottoman Land.⁷⁴

“From the last decade of 19th century, during the years of World War I and until 1923, which is the year of the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the abrogation of the capitulations, the Holy See and the Turkish Republic wanted several times to start direct diplomatic relations by appointing ambassadors, but their policy with France did not allow this.”⁷⁵ The newly-founded Turkish Republic, because of the principle of secularism, was quite reluctant to have direct relations with the Holy See. “During the early years of the Turkish Republic, the Apostolic Delegates in Turkey had difficulties to strengthen the diplomatic relations with the Government of Ankara. Monsignor Giovanni Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII, who served as the Apostolic Delegate in Istanbul for 10 years, earned respect and had good relations with the Turkish authorities.”⁷⁶ Following the visit of President Celal Bayar to the Vatican in 1959 and his meeting with John XXIII, direct diplomatic relations were established on April 11, 1960. Afterwards, embassies were opened mutually; Turkey’s Vatican Embassy started in 1962.

In the meantime, some tragic events, such as the Armenian genocide of 1915 which cost over one million Christian lives, an exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1924, the law to tax wealth passed in November 1942, which “aimed to ascertain and tax the heritage of minorities (real estate, bank accounts, businesses),”⁷⁷ anti-Greek incidents of September 6-7, 1955, along with other socio-economic restrictions imposed by the Turkish State initiated and

⁷⁴ See Poyraz, *The History of the Church Diplomacy in Turkey*; as for the religious protection of France see especially Chapter II of this book, dedicated entirely to the definition and the content of the religious protection of France in the Ottoman Land until the abolishment of capitulations in 1923; see also Marmara, *La Chiesa Latina Cattolica di Costantinopoli*, 124-144.

⁷⁵ Poyraz, *The History of the Church Diplomacy in Turkey*, 112.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁷ Marmara, *La Chiesa Latina Cattolica di Costantinopoli*, 139.

accelerated the decline of the Christian presence in Turkey. In these contexts, according to Rinaldo Marmara, a Turkish-Levantine historian specialized in the history of the Latin Catholic community in Turkey,

the decline of the Latin community of Istanbul ... strongly depended on the departure of foreigners from Turkey, due to rules aimed at Turkification of society. It can be seen through the data on baptisms and burials contained in parish registers of Istanbul (St. Mary, St. Anthony, and St. Peter) and the Feriköy's Catholic cemetery registers not only the decline of that community, but also the change in the composition of its members.⁷⁸

The presence of the Latin Catholic Church in today's Turkey is very diminished. According to estimates by the U.S. Department of State, Roman Catholics are about 25,000, including a large number of recent immigrants from Africa and the Philippines.⁷⁹ Most Christians reside in Istanbul, but there are also Christians in Smyrna and in the South, in Mersin, Antakya, Iskenderun and Mardin; others are scattered in the rest of Anatolia. In addition to the historic presence of Christians, there are new Christians who come from either conversions or by migration, in particular, Russians and people from Eastern Europe, the Philippines, non-Turkish Armenians, Georgians, Chaldeans of Iraq and Syriacs of Syria, as well as some African students who arrived in Turkey with scholarships granted by the Turkish government, and some retired Europeans who wanted to spend their old age in Turkey.⁸⁰

The structure of the Latin Catholic Church today in Turkey has three divisions: The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Izmir, the Apostolic Vicariate of Istanbul which includes the capital

⁷⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report for 2015: Turkey," August 10, 2016, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251>.

⁸⁰ See Jean-Marc Balhan, S.J. "La Chiesa Cattolica Latina nella Turchia di oggi: spargere semi di senape a tutti i venti," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3971/4 (December 12, 2015): 470.

Ankara, and the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia. Dioceses, parishes, and other institutions are staffed by foreign religious congregations and some *fidei donum* priests amounting to about 130 people, along with a few consecrated lay Turks. Among the congregations and the male religious orders in Turkey, the Franciscans are more numerous, with several Conventual, Minor, and Capuchin communities situated in different parts of the country. Then there are Dominicans, Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Salesians, a few Vincentians, Assumptionists, and also three Jesuits in Ankara and Trabzon.

There are also nuns who work in hospitals and some schools in Istanbul and Izmir, as well as those who run retreat houses or welcome Christian pilgrims. In addition, there are ecclesial movements like Focolarini and the Neocatechumens.⁸¹ There are very few local vocations, countable on the fingers of both hands, including a Capuchin priest and a brother, a Jesuit priest,⁸² a couple of the Franciscans in formation, a Franciscan nun, and a consecrated lay Salesian, all out of the country for various reasons. The difficult Turkish language poses serious problems of communication not only among religious men and women, but also between bishops and members of the clergy and the people.

Today, one of the biggest problems of this community is the lack of full recognition of its legal personality concerning churches, religious orders, and other organizations, and this makes quite difficult the status of foreign bishops, and religious men and women working for the Latin Catholic Church in Turkey, which pursues a very moderate and humble work including the commitment to refugees and migrants, publishing even to a very limited extent, as well as ecumenical and Muslim-Christian dialogue activities.

⁸¹ Ibid., 472-475.

⁸² See Carlo Marsili, *La Turchia bussava alla porta: viaggio nel paese sospeso tra Europa e Asia* (Milano: Università Bocconi, 2011), 91; Mariagrazia Zambon, *La Turchia è vicina: viaggio in un paese dai mille volti* (Milano: Ancora, 2006), 130.

The religious orders present in Turkey, indeed, sometimes organize Muslim-Christian dialogue activities at an academic level. The International Franciscan Fraternity of Istanbul, opened in 2003, aims at being a link of encounter and dialogue with the other religions present in Turkey, particularly Islam and Judaism, as well as with the other Christian Churches, particularly the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Armenian Orthodox community. For twenty years Capuchin friars in Istanbul were engaged in Muslim-Christian dialogue through annual symposia, designed by Fr. Raimondo Bardelli in collaboration with the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) and some Turkish universities. In these symposia, Muslim academics of Turkey and those Catholics mostly coming from Italy used to exchange their positions, in particular theological and philosophical arguments in order to dialogue. Also, Dominican friars for two decades have engaged in a dialogue that “does not exist if understood as between two religious universes” as Fr. Claudio Monge provocatively defines it.⁸³

The three male orders in Istanbul, Franciscans, Capuchins, and Dominicans, have joined the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart who have reopened their house facing the Istanbul islands. However, the recent coup attempt and related political issues have prevented them from continuing on this road and it was necessary to rethink the entire path of the symposia and other activities because of the fact that many of the Muslim partners engaged in them were related to Gülen’s network. Now they are considering whether to continue the dialogue with the Sufi world: “we want to be equidistant and not to be involved in issues with which religion has

⁸³ Cristina Uguccioni, “Turchia, quei rapporti incoraggianti tra cattolici e islamici,” *La Stampa*, May 27, 2016, <http://www.lastampa.it/2016/05/27/vaticaninsider/ita/inchieste-e-interviste/turchia-quei-rapporti-incoraggianti-tra-cattolici-e-islamici-UnyJCUjIWk4myn2w8SnKwN/pagina.html>.

very little to do, so we have to find new partners with whom to continue the commitment to a fruitful dialogue.”⁸⁴

The Jesuits, too, during their already 16-year presence in Ankara, have been engaged in Muslim-Christian dialogue, teaching at Ankara University Divinity School within an agreement for academic cooperation made between the University of Ankara and the Pontifical Gregorian University in the eighties, participating in seminars and conferences, and opening their library to Muslim scholars and students. Balhan’s considerations give a comprehensive view of the engagement of religious men and women in interreligious dialogue in both Istanbul and Ankara:

Life in Turkey by religious personnel also means breathing the “interreligious dialogue” with Muslims, with whom Christians interact in everyday life, in institutions, and with whom they come in contact even in the churches, when they go there to light a candle, to ask to be freed from some illness, and sometimes even to attend the celebrations, or for the preparation of many mixed marriages. This encounter with Muslims also happens when we welcome imams before they leave for Europe, or students from the faculties of Divinity. It can take on a more formal dimension in some symposia and conferences organized by an official institution, or a Sufi or neo-Sufi community. Sometimes in these meetings true friendships are born.⁸⁵

a. Papal Visits and Remarks on Muslim-Christian Dialogue

Popes usually use the same structure in their speeches and statements when they visit Turkey. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis when each visited Turkey, respectively in 1979, 2006, and 2014, wanted to underscore in the first place that it was a geographical, socio-cultural, and religious bridge. John Paul II defined Turkey as “a cross-roads and melting-pot of civilizations,

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Balhan, “La Chiesa cattolica latina nella Turchia di oggi,” 478.

at the junction of Asia and Europe,”⁸⁶ Benedict as “a bridge between East and West, between Asia and Europe, and as a crossroads of cultures and religions,”⁸⁷ and finally Francis as “a natural bridge between two continents and diverse cultures.”⁸⁸ After that they underscore the respect that the Turkish constitution has formally for principles of freedom of conscience, religion and expression, and from there they bring their attention to the religious and cultural fertility of Turkey.

Even though it was very important because it was the very first visit of a modern era pontiff to Turkey, Paul VI’s visit there had neither a meeting with the president of the Diyanet nor any special mention of Muslim-Christian dialogue. Therefore, from this point on I will focus on the Apostolic visits of his successors, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. Benedict and Francis, in addition to visiting the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and other religious leaders in Istanbul, went to Ankara, the capital of Turkey, and also met with the presidents of the Diyanet, respectively Prof. Ali Bardakoğlu and Prof. Mehmet Görmez. Their speeches and statements, which reframe the very lines of ongoing Muslim-Christian dialogue between the CC and Muslim Turkey, will also furnish more insights on the characteristics of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey.

John Paul II, in his visit in 1979, after praising the unity of modern Turkey, which is based on the promotion of the common good, and having called for a clear distinction between the civil and religious spheres, wished the Turkish people to benefit more and more from the principles of freedom of conscience, religion, worship, and teaching, recognized in the constitution:

⁸⁶ John Paul II, “The Melting Pot of Civilizations,” in *Turkey: Ecumenical Pilgrimage*, ed. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1980), 83.

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, “Incontro con il corpo diplomatico presso la Repubblica di Turchia,” in *Servitori della pace: viaggio apostolico in Turchia (28 novembre – 1 dicembre 2006)* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), 14.

⁸⁸ Francis, “Incontro con le autorità,” 7

Consciences, when they are well-formed, draw, moreover, from their deep religious convictions, let's say from their faithfulness to God, a hope, an ideal, and moral qualities of courage, loyalty, justice and brotherhood which are necessary for the happiness, the peace and the soul of all peoples. In this sense allow me to express my esteem for all believers in this country.⁸⁹

Unfortunately, in less than a year after John Paul II's visit, on Sept. 12, 1980 as a result of increasing violence between ultranationalists and communists, the Turkish army, the traditional guarantor of *laïcité* suspended democracy in a coup d'état.

Regarding the religious and cultural characteristics of Turkey, although there was no precise mention of Muslim-Christian dialogue *per se*, the pontiff underlined some very noteworthy features for a dialogue: "I wonder if it is not urgent, precisely today when Christians and Moslems have entered a new period of history, to recognize and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us, in order to preserve and promote together, for the benefit of all men [and women], 'peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values' as the Council calls upon us to do."⁹⁰ The pontiff, by recognizing spiritual bonds between Muslims and Christians as a unifying point and expressing his willingness to develop them, also showed the CC's openness to promote and preserve together peace, liberty, social justice and moral values universally shared by Muslims and Christians. John Paul's successors will follow the same path and try to be involved more deeply in the dialogue of Turkey and its religious components.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, "The Melting Pot of Civilizations," 84.

⁹⁰ John Paul II, "Always Have Courage and Pride in Your Faith," in *Turkey: Ecumenical Pilgrimage*, ed. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1980), 20.

Benedict XVI, in fact, in his address to the president of the Diyanet, wanted to quote the above-mentioned words of his predecessor.⁹¹ It is important to remember that the visit of Benedict XVI to Turkey in 2006 was realized in an atmosphere of tensions provoked by a misinterpretation of the pontiff's speech in Regensburg. Before his departure, in his meeting with journalists, the pontiff emphasized Turkey's being a bridge between different cultures, as well as a place of meeting and dialogue. Moreover, the pontiff made it clear that the dialogue in question has different levels and shades, and that in the end should aim at a better understanding among people:

I would like to emphasize that this is not a political journey, but a pastoral visit, and as a pastoral visit has its defining characteristic in dialogue and shared commitment to peace and dialogue in different dimensions: between cultures, dialogue between Christianity and Islam, dialogue with our Christian brothers, especially the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, and generally dialogue for a better understanding among us all.⁹²

Particularly significant was his response to a question on the contribution that Europe can make to Turkey in its efforts for integration and respect of the various cultural and even religious identities. Benedict XVI recalled that Atatürk had before him as a model for the reconstruction of Turkey the French constitution and the cradle of modern Turkey is dialogue with European reason and its thoughts, its way of life, so to be made again in a different historical and religious context. As the dialogue between European reason and Turkish Muslim tradition is registered in the existence of modern Turkey, the pontiff in this respect, sees a mutual responsibility. According to Benedict XVI, indeed, secularism is a central point for a real dialogue with Turkey:

⁹¹ Benedict XVI, "Incontro con il presidente del Direttorato degli Affari religiosi," 5.

⁹² Benedict XVI, "Incontro con i giornalisti prima della partenza per la Turchia," in *Servitori della pace*, 62.

“We Europeans have to rethink our secular reason, secularism, and Turkey, too, starting from its history, from its origins, must think with us about how to rebuild for the future this link between secularism and tradition, an open and tolerant reason, whose foundation is freedom, and the values that give content to freedom.”⁹³

This visit, which was aimed particularly to heal the wounds provoked by Regensburg, was not only successful but also very rich from the point of view of Muslim-Christian dialogue. Benedict XVI dedicated a considerable part of his speech to details of his interreligious and intercultural dialogue position. First and foremost, for the pontiff the interreligious and intercultural dialogue need to be approached with “optimism and hope.”⁹⁴ According to him the basis of our mutual respect and esteem, the core for a possible cooperation in the service of peace between nations and peoples, as well as the deepest wish of all believers, is the fact that Christians and Muslims, following their respective religions, point to the truth of the sacred character and dignity of the person. Other than optimism and hope the pontiff considers also “fraternal respect”⁹⁵ as a necessary point for a collaboration between Muslims and Christians.

It is interesting that in order to show “the particular charity that Christians and Muslims owe to one another,”⁹⁶ the pontiff quotes some words addressed by Gregory VII in 1076 to a Muslim prince in North Africa who had acted with great benevolence toward the Christians under his jurisdiction: “because we believe in one God, albeit in a different manner, and because we praise him and worship him every day as the Creator and Ruler of the world.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁴ See Benedict XVI, “Incontro con il presidente del Direttorato degli Affari religiosi,” 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

From Benedict XVI's address to the President of the Diyanet, we can summarize his viewpoint about interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the following points:

- i. At the center of his position there is a solid faith in the teaching of Vatican II, as he likes underscoring the fact that for more than forty years, the Council has inspired and guided the approach taken by the Holy See and by local Churches throughout the world to relations with the followers of other religions. His starting point is *NA* which following the Biblical tradition, communicates that the entire human race shares a common origin and a common destiny. These consist in God, our common Creator and the goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Christians and Muslims together belong to the family of those who believe in the one God and who, according to their respective traditions, trace their ancestry to Abraham.
- ii. After recognizing this "human and spiritual unity in our origins and our destiny," the pontiff points out our derived responsibility "to seek a common path as we play our part in the quest for fundamental values so characteristic of the people of our time."⁹⁸
- iii. This common path would be that ground on which Muslims and Christians should dialogue as they look for a "specific contribution to offer in the search for proper solutions" to some pressing questions related to "justice, development, solidarity, freedom, security, peace, defense of life, protection of the environment and of the resources of the earth." The invitation of the pontiff to respect the legitimate autonomy of temporal affairs is particularly significant for Turkey where there has been constant suspicion about the interference of religion in state affairs and *vice versa*.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

- iv. An authentic dialogue between Muslims and Christians, based on truth and inspired by a sincere wish to know one another better, respecting differences and recognizing what we have in common, according to the pontiff, can lead us to an authentic respect for the responsible choices that each person makes. Among these choices are those pertaining to the meaning and purpose of life, for each individual and for humanity as a whole, are at the center of dialogue.
- v. Muslims and Christians living in multi-ethnic and cultural societies seek together a “loyal contribution to the building up of society, in an attitude of authentic service, especially towards the most vulnerable and the very poor.” In order to reach this goal, freedom of religion should be a *sine qua non* condition “institutionally guaranteed and effectively respected in practice, both for individuals and communities.”¹⁰⁰

Benedict XVI’s visit to Turkey in 2006 was important also from a political point of view concerning the difficult relationship between the European Union and Turkey. Before the visit started all major Turkish media had quoted Benedict XVI’s (then Cardinal Ratzinger’s) words on EU-Turkey relationships. In an interview given to Sophie de Ravinel for *Le Figaro* magazine on August 13, 2004, Cardinal Ratzinger questioned the restriction of the faith only to the private sphere and clearly presented his opposition to an eventual EU membership of Turkey. Considering Europe as a cultural and non-geographical continent, Cardinal Ratzinger, in this sense, had defined Turkey as representing “another continent in history, in stark contrast to Europe.”¹⁰¹ Recalling some wars with the Byzantine Empire, the fall of Constantinople, the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁰¹ My free and partial translation from original text in French: “*Nous avons parlé de l’Europe comme d’un continent culturel et non géographique. Dans ce sens, la Turquie a toujours représenté un autre continent au cours de l’histoire, en contraste permanent avec l’Europe. Il y a eu les guerres avec*

Balkan wars and the threat to Vienna and Austria he stated that to identify the two continents would be a mistake. It would be a loss of richness, the disappearance of the cultural in favor of the economy. Turkey, which sees itself as a secular state but on the basis of Islam, could attempt to establish a cultural continent with neighboring Arab countries and thus become the protagonist of a culture with its own identity, in communion with the great humanist values that we all should recognize. This idea is not opposed to forms of association and close and friendly collaboration with Europe and would allow the emergence of a united force, opposing any form of fundamentalism.¹⁰²

Even though his clear position against Turkey's membership in the EU created big tensions in Turkish public opinion, I believe that especially his final statements in both interviews are worth taking into consideration and would be very useful for interreligious and intercultural dialogue with Turkey in a larger sense. Honestly, although populist speeches of Turkish leaders, among them especially President Erdoğan, claim the contrary, Turkey has never been seriously

l'Empire byzantin, pensez aussi à la chute de Constantinople, aux guerres balkaniques et à la menace pour Vienne et l'Autriche... Je pense donc ceci : identifier les deux continents serait une erreur. Il s'agirait d'une perte de richesse, de la disparition du culturel au profit de l'économie. La Turquie, qui se considère comme un État laïc, mais sur le fondement de l'islam, pourrait tenter de mettre en place un continent culturel avec des pays arabes voisins et devenir ainsi le protagoniste d'une culture possédant sa propre identité, mais en communion avec les grandes valeurs humanistes que nous tous devrions reconnaître. Cette idée ne s'oppose pas à des formes d'associations et de collaboration étroite et amicale avec l'Europe et permettrait l'émergence d'une force unie s'opposant à toute forme de fondamentalisme." Sophie de Ravinel, "Cardinal Ratzinger: Identifier la Turquie à l'Europe serait une erreur," *Le Figaro*, April 13, 2004. The entire interview can be found through the following link: <http://www.libertepolitique.com/Actualite/Decryptage/Se-taire-sur-les-racines-chretiennes-de-l-Europe-est-dangereux>.

¹⁰² de Ravinel, "Cardinal Ratzinger: Identifier la Turquie à l'Europe serait une erreur." Cardinal Ratzinger had repeated this position on several other occasions always with the same accents; please see his words in the course of a series of exchanges between the participants of the Velletri Congress, concerning the basic content of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*. Giuseppe Rusconi, "Il Cardinale Joseph Ratzinger su Turchia e Unione europea," *Giornale del Popolo*, September 20, 2004, <http://www.rossoporpora.org/rubriche/interviste-a-cardinali/81-il-card-ratzinger-su-turchia-e-ue-giornale-del-popolo.html>.

committed in its efforts to fulfill the criteria for EU membership. In the light of current developments between Turkey and the EU it is not so difficult to foresee that Turkey's membership is not likely to happen in coming years. Therefore, the "forms of association and close and friendly collaboration with Europe"¹⁰³ foreseen by Cardinal Ratzinger would be unavoidable not only for Turkey but also for Europe. The ongoing Syrian refugee crisis is admittedly a proof of this. The way of a particular partnership with Turkey aimed to "allow the emergence of a united force, opposing any form of fundamentalism"¹⁰⁴ will pass definitely through a sincere dialogue, which should have both interreligious and intercultural layers.

It must be recognized that statements made when a person is a pope may differ from those made when he was a Cardinal. Consequently, Benedict XVI in his visit to Turkey kept underlining the necessity to dialogue with Turkey but did not repeat the then Cardinal Ratzinger's opposition to Turkey's candidacy. As noted by Alessandri, "especially since the apostolic trip to Turkey in 2006, Benedict XVI has worked to promote interreligious dialogue between Catholic Christians and Muslims and has concentrated on verifying Turkish authorities' commitment to the protection of the Christian community in Anatolia, generally avoiding comments that could be read as a 'no' to Turkey in the EU."¹⁰⁵

Along the lines of the previous summary of Benedict XVI's interreligious point of view addressed to the President of the Diyanet, here I present a further synthesis of his point of view explained in the meeting with the diplomatic corps to the Republic of Turkey:

¹⁰³ de Ravinel, "Cardinal Ratzinger: Identifier la Turquie à l'Europe serait une erreur."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Emiliano Alessandri, "Italian-Turkish Relations: Potential and Limits of a 'Strategic Partnership,'" *Perceptions* 16/1 (2011): 97.

- i. Benedict XVI recognized and expressed his appreciation for the major characteristics of the Turkish State, which is a “great modern State, notably by the choice of a secular regime, with a clear distinction between civil society and religion, each of which was to be autonomous in its proper domain while respecting the sphere of the other.”¹⁰⁶
- ii. Pointing to the fact that “the majority of the population of this country is Muslim is a significant element in the life of society, which the State cannot fail to take into account,”¹⁰⁷ he once again expressed his appreciation for the fact that the current Turkish Constitution recognizes every citizen’s right to freedom of worship and freedom of conscience.
- iii. Pointing to the universally recognized principle that “the civil authorities of every democratic country are duty bound to guarantee the effective freedom of all believers and to permit them to organize freely the life of their religious communities,”¹⁰⁸ the pontiff expressed his expectations of the Turkish State in terms of a hope that believers of all religious communities without any distinction and discrimination would be able to continue to benefit from these rights.
- iv. The pontiff declared his personal conviction that “religious liberty is a fundamental expression of human liberty and that the active presence of religions in society is a source of progress and enrichment for all,” once again pointing to one of the biggest historical problems of Turkey, that is, interference of religion in politics and *vice versa*: “religions do not seek to exercise direct political power, as that is not their province.”¹⁰⁹
- v. The pontiff, moreover, underscored another responsibility of religions, that is, “they utterly refuse to sanction recourse to violence as a legitimate expression of religion” and recalled the

¹⁰⁶ Benedict XVI, “Incontro con il corpo diplomatico,” 14.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

work of the “small in number but deeply committed”¹¹⁰ Catholic community in Turkey, contributed to Turkey’s development by educating the young and by building peace and harmony among all citizens.

Benedict XVI’s recollection on the presence of the small but committed Catholic community in Turkey and its contribution to Turkish society especially in education and building peace is very important for any anticipated Muslim-Christian dialogue with the help and encouragement of political and civil Turkish authorities. In this regard the pontiff addresses the attention of the diplomatic corps to an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures recalling his recent intervention to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority: “we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful co-operation, to overcome all the tensions together.”¹¹¹

So as to work for the fulfilment of human aspirations in search of God and in search of happiness, this dialogue must enable different religions to come to know one another better and to respect one another. Religions can play a big role in resolving numerous challenges our societies currently face. Recognizing this role within society is a necessary step in order to explore more deeply their knowledge of humans and to respect the dignity of each, by placing them at the center of political, economic, cultural, and social activity. Therefore, Benedict XVI encourages Muslim Turks to “continue to work together, in mutual respect, to promote the dignity of every human being and the growth of a society where personal freedom and care for others provide peace and serenity for all.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ See Benedict XVI, “Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy,” September 25, 2006, Vatican Website.

¹¹² Benedict XVI, “Incontro con il corpo diplomatico,” 16.

Francis' visit to Turkey in 2014 echoed his predecessors about Muslim-Christian dialogue. The pontiff recognized and remarked on the great responsibility that Turkey has by virtue of its history, geographical position, and regional influence. In this sense, according to the Pope, "the choices which Turkey makes and its example are especially significant and can be of considerable help in promoting an encounter of civilizations and in identifying viable paths of peace and authentic progress."¹¹³

Here are some remarks of Francis made on interreligious dialogue in general and Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey in particular. In his meeting with the diplomatic corps of the Republic of Turkey, Francis underlined that,

- i. Dialogue can deepen the understanding and appreciation of the many things which Catholics and Muslims hold in common. Therefore, a dialogue would allow us to reflect sensibly and serenely on our differences, and to learn from them.
- ii. So as to "overcome prejudices and unwarranted fears, leaving room for respect, encounter, and the release of more positive energies for the good of all,"¹¹⁴ our major aim has to be reaching a durable peace founded on respect for the fundamental rights and duties rooted in the dignity of each person.
- iii. On the same page with his predecessors, Francis points to the importance of freedom of religion and freedom of expression, truly guaranteed to each citizen – Muslim, Jewish, and Christian. Guaranteed this freedom "they will then find it easier to see each other as brothers and sisters who are travelling the same path, seeking always to reject misunderstandings while promoting cooperation and concord."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Francis, "Incontro con le autorità," 9-10.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

iv. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue can play an important role in order to put an end to all forms of fundamentalism and terrorism which gravely demean the dignity of every man and woman and exploit religion. In this regard, the pontiff presents the pillars of a hoped-for solidarity of all believers in order to defeat “fanaticism and fundamentalism, as well as irrational fears which foster misunderstanding and discrimination.”¹¹⁶ These pillars are respect for human life and for religious freedom, that is the freedom to worship and to live according to the moral teachings of one’s religion; commitment to ensuring what each person requires for a dignified life; and care for the natural environment.

In his meeting with the President of the Diyanet, Francis underscores that,

- i. The path of an authentic and institutional interreligious and intercultural dialogue pass by good relations and dialogue between religious leaders as an example that “mutual respect and friendship are possible, notwithstanding differences.”¹¹⁷
- ii. According to the pontiff, religious leaders have responsibility to fight against all violations against human dignity and human rights. There is no violence which can be justified by religions. The pontiff underlines that the example of religious men and women “capable of living as brothers and sisters, regardless of ethnic, religious, cultural, or ideological difference”¹¹⁸ is necessary and expected by all believers.
- iii. According to the pontiff, denouncing such violations is not in itself enough, for we all must also collaborate, “governments, political and religious leaders, representatives of civil society, and all men and women of goodwill,”¹¹⁹ in order to find suitable solutions.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Francis, “Visita al presidente degli Affari religiosi al Diyanet,” in *Nella fede e nella carità*, 13.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

- iv. Francis refers to “spiritual treasures of inestimable worth” that both Muslims and Christians share, though lived according to the traditions of each, such as the adoration of God, reference to the Patriarch Abraham, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, through an authentic interreligious dialogue can help us to promote and to uphold moral values, peace, and freedom in society.¹²⁰
- v. Like his predecessors, Francis also recognizes that “the sanctity of each human life is the basis of joint initiatives of solidarity, compassion, and effective help directed to those who suffer most.” In this regard, the pontiff sees and appreciates the efforts of Turkish people, Muslims and Christians alike, to help the hundreds of thousands of refugees who are fleeing their countries due to conflicts. According to the pontiff, the refugee crisis and a possible collaboration for its better management “is a clear example of how we can work together to serve others, an example to be encouraged and maintained.”¹²¹
- vi. The pontiff, encouraging all to pursue ongoing efforts in interreligious dialogue, points out that “every initiative which promotes authentic dialogue will offer a sign of hope to a world which so deeply needs peace, security, and prosperity.”¹²²

According to Francis that form of Muslim-Christian dialogue based on academic investigation of the positions of the parties has come to an end. At this point, Muslims and Christians have to find new forms of dialogue, a dialogue based on an exchange of personal experiences and not only on theology, and made among religious men and women of different faiths seems the future of Muslim-Christian dialogue indicated by Francis.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 16.

¹²³ Francis, “Conferenza stampa durante il volo di ritorno,” in *Nella fede e nella carità*, 39-40.

b. The Diyanet Presidents' Remarks on Muslim-Christian Dialogue

The former President of the Diyanet, Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz,¹²⁴ made a visit to the Vatican on June 14-18, 2000 whose goal was Muslim-Christian dialogue and mutual collaboration with the CC. This first visit of its kind to the Vatican gave new impetus to the commitment of the Diyanet to Muslim-Christian dialogue. The President of the Diyanet was hosted by Cardinal Francis Arinze, Monsignor Jean-Louis Tauran, Cardinal Achille Silvestrini and some other senior Vatican officials, and of course John Paul II. The meeting of President Yılmaz with John Paul II, held on June 16, 2000, and the fact that this meeting was a first in the history of relations between Vatican and the Diyanet, makes it a milestone for Muslim-Christian dialogue's journey with Turkey.

A comprehensive summary of Yılmaz's interventions would be helpful in order to understand better the Diyanet's point of view about Muslim-Christian dialogue at that time and its development throughout following years until nowadays:

- i. In his meeting with Cardinal Arinze, President Yılmaz pointed out that throughout history although with some interruptions there have been good relations between Muslims and Christians. Today the world has shrunk and become a global village; consequently, military, political, and commercial relations and associations are working for the benefit of

¹²⁴ Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz was born in Erzurum in 1943. He graduated from the Faculty of Theology in Erzurum, and earned a master's degree in interpretation from Ankara University Faculty of Theology. In 1990, he became a member of the High Board of Religious Affairs, in 1991 was appointed Vice President of the Diyanet, in 1992 became acting President of the Diyanet, and from 1992 to 2003 he was its President.

humankind. So, the President asks, “why cannot believers of religions engage in dialogue in this environment?”¹²⁵

- ii. Yılmaz underscores the fact that there are many Turkish citizens already living in Europe as well as Christian minorities living in Turkey, which is a good reason for a dialogue.
- iii. The President, quoting the Quran (5:48) which says “For each among you We have appointed a law and way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So, vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ,” points out that the cohabitation of different religions is part of God’s providence, therefore we need to meet each other “on a common word.”¹²⁶
- iv. According to Yılmaz one of the principal tasks of the states is to create an atmosphere of dialogue for their citizens who belong to different faiths. In this context, Turkey is making efforts to realize interreligious dialogue, which would enable people in different cultures and religions to understand each other better. Due to rapidly developing globalization, he says “efforts of interreligious dialogue have become an obligation, not an option. That is why we, as the Diyanet, have established a unit to work on interreligious dialogue.”¹²⁷
- v. Yılmaz underlines the need to avoid missionary activities or proselytism under the guise of interreligious dialogue: “Every religion wants the number of its members to increase. But this is an ideal. What is important here is that the members of one religion do not work on

¹²⁵ See Harun Özdemirci, “Tarihte ilk kez gerçekleşen Katolik aleminin merkezi Vatikan’da Diyanet İşleri Başkanı ve Papa buluşması,” *Diyanet Dergisi* 115/7 (2000): 10.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

believers who believe in another religion. I want to express that we are against this kind of attitude.”¹²⁸

- vi. Acting on the fact that there are “unbelievers, atheists and materialists in every country,”¹²⁹ he says that to the clergy has been given great responsibility for the purpose of guiding these people, and that interreligious dialogue could be a great contribution to the joint work to be done in this regard.
- vii. On the basis of statistical information, Yılmaz points out that there are a lot of young people who feel a kind of emptiness and most of them are drug addicts. So, according to Yılmaz, religious leaders through interreligious dialogue can find a way to collaborate in order to help them.
- viii. Yılmaz, finally, mentions that the dialectic should not only remain among the representatives of religion, but also spread to the people. There is need for solid mutual knowledge among religions to bring the religious dialogue to the people’s level. Consequently, Yılmaz offers an exchange of students and specialists as well as some mutual scholarships between Turkey and the Vatican for this.
- ix. He also suggests that a joint work should be undertaken to remove from textbooks those issues that lead to the creation of bad images based on incomplete, incorrect information that hurts believers for the development of interreligious dialogue.
- x. What is attention-catching is that, also in his meeting with Cardinal Etchegaray, Yılmaz insists on the importance of extending interreligious dialogue to the people of the two religions more than a dialoging among religious leaders and academics: “The religious men

¹²⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

[and women] of two religions should enter into dialogue with the people they represent.

Dialogue should be spread to the public; the issues should be brought to the public.”¹³⁰

- xi. Another interesting insight that President Yılmaz brings to the attention of Cardinal Etchegaray is an invitation to focus on the common points of religions rather than their divergences, i.e., the Unity of God. According to Yılmaz “removing differences and unifying religions is not likely possible. Nor is it necessary.”¹³¹ The fact that different religions coexist together is of Providence and so we have to respect it.

The Diyanet President’s visit to the Vatican opened a new era for Muslim-Christian dialogue and for the Vatican-Diyanet relationship. Popes in their following visits to Turkey started meeting the Diyanet in Ankara. The first of these, as mentioned above, was made by Benedict XVI (during a very tense period following his Regensburg speech) to the President of Diyanet Ali Bardakoğlu.¹³² Described by Akyol, as “known to be a liberal and progressive theologian,” Bardakoğlu “had also been one of the first critics of the pontiff’s Regensburg speech,” in which he seemed to have implied that Islam was a religion of the sword. Bardakoğlu “had indeed criticized the pope quite straightforwardly, along with his condemnation of the violence that some Muslims had unleashed after the pontiff’s controversial speech.”¹³³

In the press conference Bardakoğlu repeats some of his previously expressed criticisms, but also gives messages of dialogue and reconciliation. Along with Islam, he praises other “divine

¹³⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Prof. Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu was born in Tosya district in Kastamonu in 1952. He graduated from the High Islamic Institute in Istanbul in 1974 and Istanbul University Faculty of Law in 1975. He earned his PhD in 1982 in Islamic Law and in 1994 he became a professor of Islamic Law. He was President of the Diyanet from 2003 to 2010.

¹³³ Akyol, “The Mitre Meets the Turban.”

religions, which all promote peace.”¹³⁴ Bardakoğlu remarks that Anatolia has cradled among the divine religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as many other ancient religions, cultures, and civilizations, and Muslims who have adopted Anatolia in the last decades, “see this as imperative to respect and preserve the cultural and historical legacy of other religions. We believe the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity on earth is the manifestation of divine love.”¹³⁵

Bardakoğlu complains about secularization, which “has caused a great deviation in our spiritual, moral, and human life by blocking the ear to the divine call of religion. As a result, it is no less necessary today than yesterday, that today’s man and woman who is faltering and perplexed, earthly, and lonely in various material and spiritual problems, to embrace the invitation of religion.”¹³⁶ This is why there is a great need for religious leaders and religious institutions to devote themselves to this crisis. He also points out that we are all “children of Adam,” and as “the ideal of brotherhood and love” which we share is based on this, according to Bardakoğlu the clergy has the duty to “direct and guide the believers to the truth and good.”¹³⁷

He adds that Muslim-Christian dialogue should be carried out in the light of the following principles: It should not be expected that believers of different religions should have to approve one another’s religions. They should be able, instead, to come together and speak together and work together in solving the problems facing humankind. Moreover, nobody should use this collective effort and communication, that is interreligious dialogue, as a means to find supporters for their own religion. Religious leaders should strive to find solutions to the common problems

¹³⁴ “T.C. Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Prof. Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu’nun Türkiye’yi ziyaret etmekte olan Papa XVI. Benedikt’le görüşmesi vesilesiyle yaptıkları basın açıklaması,” November 28, 2006, www.diyamet.gov.tr.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

of humankind when they come together, without wasting time trying to show the superiority of their beliefs and discussing the theology of religions.

Recalling “education, health, security, nutrition, hunger, poverty and environmental problems, terrorism and violence, ideological and profitable wars, exploitative backwardness and injustice,” Bardakoğlu says that “none of these problems is rooted in religion. On the contrary, divine religions have strong messages that will contribute to the solution of these problems.”¹³⁸ Consequently, he encourages religious leaders of different faiths to fight these problems starting from the unifying nature of their religious and divine truths.

Bardakoğlu also points out the responsibility of religious leaders, scholars, and institutions to contribute to the resolution of the above mentioned social problems. On the same line, according to Bardakoğlu, religious leaders share the same obligation to combat the “moral and spiritual crisis” that the modern world confronts, and which causes “harmful habits such as drugs, prostitution, abuse of alcohol, and many dangers such as epidemic diseases.” It is imperative, according to the Muslim scholar, that religious institutions lead the way by fighting against all kinds of thoughts and initiatives which will make the institution of family meaningless, by eliminating all kinds of discrimination against women, and by educating our children appropriately to avoid abuse and finally by getting rid of bad habits that our young people are exposed to.¹³⁹

Refusing claims that Islam promoted violence and did not value human reason, Bardakoğlu said that such claims corresponded to “Islamophobia,” which aligns Islam and terrorism and which is indeed a slander “that does not correspond to any historical or scholarly fact, and which is not reconcilable with notions of justice and fairness.” This phobia only strengthens “those who

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

use Islam for their misdeeds,” he added, “whereas Muslims are opposed to all kinds of terrorism and violence against innocents.” Therefore, talking about Islamophobia, Bardakoğlu invites religious leaders and institutions not to be prisoners of these prejudices based on unfounded fears and worries, but “prudent in the establishment of universal peace and serenity.”¹⁴⁰

Bardakoğlu, finally, emphasizes his willingness to keep the means of communication open to everyone in tolerance and mutual respect, based on right knowledge and good intentions. According to him, this availability is extremely important in the world we live in, to be able to make progress in the way of divine truths and human ends. In his final statements, Bardakoğlu, indicates a roadmap for the future steps of interreligious dialogue; a dialogue “revitalized and strengthened on an ethical basis” for the “development of an ambience based on consensus, mutual respect among members of different religions, beliefs, cultures, and civilizations.”¹⁴¹

Soon after this historical meeting with the pontiff, Bardakoğlu released a statement to the major Turkish media agency Anadolu. This statement also is very significant as it gives some other insights about the point of view of the Diyanet on a “healthy” interreligious dialogue and Muslim-Christian dialogue in particular:

- i. A “healthy manner.” Bardakoğlu says that both parties wish a warm dialogue between religions. In order to prosper in a healthy manner, all parties should look at everyone’s convictions and culture as sources of richness since “not only Islam but also all other

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

monotheistic faiths are a source of peace and that visits like the Pope's are an opportunity for healthy dialogue.”¹⁴²

- ii. Re-defining the dialogue. Bardakoğlu points out that the concept of dialogue has been differently perceived by everyone, and that a more correct definition to use would be “dialogue among representatives of different religions” rather than “dialogue between religions.”¹⁴³
- iii. Mutual respect for beliefs and religious identities. Bardakoğlu emphasized that for a healthy dialogue it would be sufficient for two different members of religion to respect each other's beliefs, values, and identities in order to establish healthy relations between their religions, by protecting their own identities and beliefs: “In order to settle such a dialogue there is of course no need to acknowledge belief in the other religion, to participate in their worship. Perhaps most significant in this regard is that everybody has to protect their own beliefs, and to do their own worship.”¹⁴⁴
- iv. Everyone in his or her sacred worship place. Bardakoğlu, criticizing indirectly big interreligious meetings, which are “noteworthy in terms of image and popular culture, but cannot be a healthy way of dialogue,” explains that “dialogue means that everyone can speak with respect and mutual understanding while they maintain their own religious identity,” but it doesn't mean “meeting and blending different religions in order to produce a common belief.”¹⁴⁵ According to Bardakoğlu, religions and beliefs claim the truthfulness of themselves, and every believer exhibits true and sincere piety as long as he or she sees his or

¹⁴² “Sayın Başkan'ın Papa ziyareti sonrası yapılan değerlendirmeler üzerine Anadolu Ajansı'na verdiği beyanat,” December 5, 2006, www.diyaret.gov.tr.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

her religion as a statement of truth and remains faithful to the requirements of his own religion. For a healthy dialogue, Bardakoğlu recalls an ancient Turkish saying: “since the Ottoman period, freedom of religion and interreligious tolerance have been provided by saying ‘we want to see Muslims in the mosque, Christians in the church, and Jews in the synagogue.’”¹⁴⁶

- v. Responsibilities of clergy. Bardakoğlu, finally, points out the fact that paradoxically some key concepts such as human rights, democracy, freedom, and basic virtues of morality can sometimes be used as a means or agents of conflict, misused for wrong purposes. Therefore, aware of this, religious leaders and scholars must come together only for peace purposes, as they cannot be “actors or supporters of international politics, which produce conflicts and tensions.”¹⁴⁷

In his meeting with Pope Francis, the current President of Diyanet Mehmet Görmez¹⁴⁸ started by underscoring the importance of the pontiff’s visit for Turkey: “It is certain that, in today’s world, in which our differences are easily customized and the walls of fear are built, hosting the spiritual leader of the Catholic world in our country where the members of all divine religions have lived throughout history without exposing to any discrimination, is very important.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Prof. Dr. Mehmet Görmez, the current President of the Diyanet, was born in Gaziantep in 1959. He completed his undergraduate studies in the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University. He earned his PhD in 1994 with a thesis entitled “The Issue of Methodology in Understanding and Interpreting the Sunnah and Hadith,” and was promoted to full professorship in 2006. He has researched and taught in Kazakhstan, Egypt, and the United Kingdom. He was appointed as the Vice President of the Diyanet in 2003 and assumed his post as the President of the Diyanet in 2010. He is married and father of three children. He speaks both Arabic and English, and has numerous publications.

¹⁴⁹ “Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Mehmet Görmez ve Papa Franciscus’dan ortak açıklama,” November 28, 2014, www.diyanet.gov.tr.

Before introducing some major elements of his point of view about interreligious dialogue Görmez recalls the beginnings of religions, talking about God's messengers and how God guided us "to guidance and light in the face of perversity and darkness, and invited us to faithfulness and sincerity, chastity, and justice. This invitation was for all people. But we humans, especially for a few centuries, could not appreciate the value of this divine invitation."¹⁵⁰ Görmez believes that humanity failed to understand God's message and so "brought the world to the brink of catastrophe." According to him this is our common guilt and no one can escape from this responsibility: "Whatever is our faith, every conscience has fallen under the heavy burden of unsuccessful guardianship against the confusion and turmoil that humankind has been dragged through."¹⁵¹

Like his predecessors, Yılmaz and Bardakoğlu, Görmez also defends Islam against accusations by saying that "Islam is a religion of peace" and that "Muslims vehemently refuse extinction and slaughter of others" as is produced by some who "take totally contrary ways to the message of Islam, by spreading violence and savagery, no matter how they call themselves; they are in rebellion against Allah." Görmez defines Islamophobia as a "new breed of racism and hate crime," and compares it to anti-Semitism, which "has polluted the pages of history as a shame, and the anti-Muslim opposition will give the same result, that is, to add filthy pages to history." Görmez hopes that, no matter what religion or belief it is, "all human beings who possess understanding and conscience, will not be deceived by the savage scenarios, which aim to humiliate their minds."¹⁵² With regard to dialogue, Görmez makes remarks similar to his predecessors:

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

- i. Responsibilities of clergy. Ongoing socio-economic problems in our world, such as “social imbalance, economic looting, lack of welfare, and the bitter consequences of the consumerism order, and all these issues, especially the refugee issue,” have given religious institutions some duties. According to Görmez, the responsibilities of religious leaders cannot be limited to celebrating funerals of the deceased; religion gives life to human beings and does not want people to die but to live in peace. Religious institutions, therefore, “should endeavor and strive in every way to fight what threatens human life and impedes peaceful life. In this sense, it is vitally important that all religions work together based on the virtues.”¹⁵³
- ii. Re-defining the dialogue. Religious leaders, rather than discussing the claims of truth about the theological points of view of their religions and confessions, should seek in the name of humanity to work together in order to resolve some common problems such as drug abuse, alcoholism, violence against women, street children, hunger, hatred, conflicts, environmental problems, deterioration of the ecological balance of the world, religious fanaticism, and freedom of belief. “Today, in the face of the efforts of different religions and sects to alienate one another, those who have an ancient tradition must seek a moral and legal way to live together.”¹⁵⁴
- iii. A shared wisdom. After quoting different verses taken from the Torah, the Bible, and the Quran on justice, Görmez wants to show that we all share a common “ageless wisdom, which is the inheritance of all of us, our history, our world, and our promises that we all need.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

iv. A common future. Görmez finally invites all religious to think as human beings and to think for our humanity: “Let us avoid saying ‘me, you,’ and see what we can do together for our common future. Let us turn our worries into hope and pray to our God to remove our worries about the future of humankind and realize our hopes, lead us out from darkness into the light, grab our hands and take our worries away and not leave us to ourselves.”¹⁵⁶

4. The Controversial Muslim Cleric Fethullah Gülen and his Hizmet Movement

Another significant partner of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey has been Fethullah Gülen and his Hizmet Movement, at least until July 15, 2016. Indeed, if there had not been the failed coup in Turkey, I would probably have introduced Gülen as many others do, as “an adept of Sufi Islam, a mystic, and an advocate of nonviolence,”¹⁵⁷ the foundation of whose message “consists of joining religious belief and modern scientific education to create a better world, one based on positive activism, altruism, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and a desire to serve others and thereby gain God’s good pleasure.”¹⁵⁸

Gülen is influenced by Bediüzzaman Said-i Nursî (1877-1960) a Muslim thinker of Kurdish origin from Turkey and the author of the *Risale-i Nur*, a near-6,000-page Islamic exegesis on the Quran, and by the *Nurculuk*, a teaching produced by *Nurcular*, the religious community that came to be organized around Nursî. Gülen’s teachings rely on the Turkish Sufi tradition and refer also to the ideas of the medieval mystic poet Mevlânâ Jalâl ad-Dîn Muhammad Rûmî, known also as founder of the Mevlevi order. The Gülen belief system emphasizes the “Turkish” traditions of Islamic practice over recent Wahhabi doctrines. Consistent with Gözaydın, the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ra’fat Al-Dajani and Drew Christiansen, “Who is Fethullah Gülen?” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/who-fethullah-gulen>.

¹⁵⁸ Fethullah Gülen, *Essays, Perspectives, Opinions* (Rutherford, NJ: Fountain, 2002), i.

Gülen movement also has a “nationalist focus, in that it envisages an Islamic world shaped by an ‘enlightened’ Turkish culture rather than a ‘reactionary’ Arab one.”¹⁵⁹

Actually according to Jesuit Thomas Michel, the former Secretary for Interreligious Dialogue of the Society of Jesus, Gülen is “one of the most influential Muslim scholars and spiritual leaders in the Islamic world today” and “the movement inspired and guided by [him] is offering Muslims a way to live out Islamic values amidst the complex demands of modern societies.”¹⁶⁰ He became an increasingly well-known person in Turkey, a focus of public attention and interest, and even a national event within a short period of time, since 1995, following many interviews released to leading journalists. Gülen’s fame, meanwhile, surpassed the borders of Turkey, and he became an international figure because of his increasing commitment to dialogue between religions at a global level. The Gülen Movement established hundreds of schools in five continents, used the facilities of a market-oriented economic model and built a financial empire. The Gülen Movement was considered one of the richest religious communities in Turkey, because, unlike other religious communities, the followers of Gülen owned TV and radio channels, newspapers, as well as scientific and political journals. In addition, they run an insurance company and a special financial society; the investments of the movement span a broad spectrum including the banking, insurance, services, printing, chemicals, and textiles sectors.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ İştâ B. Gözaydın, “The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey: A Chance for Democratization or a Trojan Horse?” *Democratization* 16/6 (2009): 1219.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Michel, S.J., *Peace and Dialogue in a Plural Society: Contributions of the Hizmet Movement at a Time of Global Tensions* (New York, NY: Blue Dome, 2014), x.

¹⁶¹ See Filiz Başkan, “The Fethullah Gülen Community: Contribution or Barrier to the Consolidation of Democracy in Turkey?” *Middle Eastern Studies* 41/6 (2005): 850-851; Gözaydın, “The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey,” 1219.

Despite his claim to adhere to a moderate Islam, following the increasing doubts about his activities, Gülen and his group became a target, and he consequently left Turkey, removing himself to the United States where he has lived since 1999, claiming that he is in the USA to receive medical treatment.¹⁶² According to Yavuz, for many, “including the *Kemalist* secularist bloc in Turkey and neoconservatives in America,” Gülen and his movement are “a sinister wolf in sheep’s clothing whose promotion of Muslim modernism and interfaith cooperation hides a radical hardline Islamist agenda.”¹⁶³ And according to Gareth Jenkins, a writer and journalist who has been based in Istanbul since 1989, “there were persistent rumors that his followers were trying to infiltrate the secular establishment, particularly the Turkish military.”¹⁶⁴

Actually, regarding the movement’s business interests, as reported by Gözaydın, many commentators [had] suspect[ed] strong lines of patronage between the present AKP government and the Gülen movement. Under the current AKP administration, a number of business groups owned by avowed members of the movement [had] grown rapidly with the help of state contracts and concessions.... Many Turkish commentators (and some members of the Turkish judiciary) appear[ed] to suspect the movement of sinister intentions, particularly towards the secular establishment in Turkey and the Turkic republics.¹⁶⁵

Despite the fact that with the failed coup all these suspicions seem to be verified, Gülen, through universities, high schools, dialogue centers, etc., run by his international network has been a significant partner of interreligious dialogue. In this regard, according to Gözaydın, “starting in the early 1990s, Gülen was the first spiritual leader in Turkey to express his views on

¹⁶² See Gözaydın, “The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey,” 1218.

¹⁶³ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11; see also Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, “Fethullah Gülen and the Jews: A Different Angle. Gülen Is Emerging as a Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing, and We Should Care,” *The Jerusalem Post*, July 10, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Fethullah-Gülen-and-the-Jews-A-different-angle-459953>.

¹⁶⁴ Jenkins, *Political Islam in Turkey*, 159.

¹⁶⁵ Gözaydın, “The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey,” 1219-1220.

the necessity of interfaith dialogue.”¹⁶⁶ In 1994 he founded the Journalists and Writers Foundation (*Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı*)¹⁶⁷ which was “a civic initiative that purports to look for ways to ... build a common living space based on reconciliation and mutual respect”¹⁶⁸ and with that he officially started promoting dialogue and tolerance in Turkey and in other countries.

In the context of his Intercultural Dialogue Platform, Gülen has held talks with many religious leaders and institutions, such as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomeus I in April, 1996, Pope John Paul II in February, 1998, Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron in 1999, as well as a number of other worldwide religious leaders. He founded hundreds of dialogue associations and charities all over the world, among which the Dialogue Society established in 1999 in London and the Rumi Forum established in 2000 in Washington, DC have particular importance. He also created a circle inviting numerous scholars and intellectuals from different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, known as the Abant Platform. According to Gözaydın “this platform is the first of its kind in Turkey, an environment where intellectuals could agree to disagree on sensitive issues such as laicism, secularism, peaceful co-existence, ‘faith and reason’ relations, and the status of one of Turkey’s minority religious groups, the Alevis.”¹⁶⁹

Given his considerable commitment to Muslim-Christian dialogue, a summary of his world view is necessary. In synthesis, Gülen urges his audience to search for the truth by establishing a balance between material and spiritual values as a way to be able to enjoy serenity and true

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 1223.

¹⁶⁷ After the understanding that most journalists who are members of the organization supported the Gülenist coup attempt of July 15th, the activities of the institution and all relevant platforms were legally terminated by Decree Law No. 667 dated July 23, 2016.

¹⁶⁸ Caroline Tee, *The Gülen Movement in Turkey: The Politics of Islam and Modernity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 119.

¹⁶⁹ Gözaydın, “The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey,” 1224; see also Gülen, *Essays, Perspectives, Opinions*, 6-8.

happiness. He foresees an age of tolerance, understanding, and international cooperation ultimately leading to a single inclusive civilization based on intercultural dialogue and the sharing of values, and he believes the road to justice for all depends on providing adequate and appropriate universal education. According to him only this would ensure the sufficient understanding and tolerance necessary for securing the rights of and respect for others. In order to build a society in which individual rights and freedoms are respected and protected and there is equal opportunity for all, democracy and democratic institutions should be modernized and consolidated.¹⁷⁰

As Gülen sees that the natural sciences instead of leading people to God, cause widespread unbelief, and this trend is strongest in the West, he urges the necessity of a Muslim-Christian dialogue aiming to seek together, Muslims and Christians, to realize religion's basic oneness and unity, as well as the universality of belief. For Gülen, religion *per se* "embraces all beliefs and races in brotherhood, and exalts love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood, and freedom via its Prophets."¹⁷¹

In order to have a successful dialogue those who are involved in dialogue "must forget the past, ignore polemics, and focus on common points." In this regard, Gülen observes that the western perspective on Islam's Prophet "has softened" and many Christian clerics among whom Charles L. Ledit, Olivier Lacombe and Thomas Merton expressed warmth for Islam and the Prophet, and supported dialogue, all this openness can be taken as a help to promote interreligious dialogue with Christians. Also Vatican II, "which initiated the dialogue," shows that the CC's attitude has changed, and therefore cannot be ignored. Gülen, recognizing the western scientific, technological, economic, and military supremacy on the one hand, and

¹⁷⁰ See Gülen, *Essays, Perspectives, Opinions*, 5-6.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 32-33.

claiming for Islam an “uncorrupted and living spiritual tradition rooted in the Quran and Sunnah” on the other hand, points out that both sides can benefit from each other.¹⁷²

Underlining that “the Islamic statement of faith—There is no god but God—is a call not to do certain things,” through interreligious dialogue Gülen invites the followers of revealed religions to end their separation. The fact that, at the very outset of the Quran there is an invitation to Muslims to accept the prophets previous to Muhammad and their books, for Gülen is a motive to promote and engage in interreligious dialogue. The Quran’s criticism of the “People of the Book for wrong behavior, incorrect thought, resistance to truth, creation of hostility, and undesirable characteristics ... were also directed toward Muslims who engaged in such behavior.” Moreover, all revealed religions are based on peace, security, and world harmony, and all of them value human life. Given all these commonalities, interreligious dialogue is not optional. According to Gülen the pillars of dialogue are love, altruism, compassion, forgiveness, and tolerance, “which is the most essential element of moral systems, and a very important source of spiritual discipline and virtue.”¹⁷³

Gülen’s major concern is not only religion *per se*, but also how to improve religiosity and to increase both tolerance and interreligious dialogue, and in order to reach these goals he urges to forget the divisive arguments of the past and to concentrate on common points that religions share.¹⁷⁴ It follows that for many, especially those outside Turkey who do not know well the dynamics of Turkish society or try to interpret them with their own criteria, it is very difficult to understand how a movement based on tolerance, love, respect, and service can become an out-

¹⁷² Ibid., 34-37.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 38-43; see also Trudy D. Conway, *Cross-cultural Dialogue on the Virtues: The Contribution of Fethullah Gülen* (London: Springer, 2014), 1-13, 21-39; Caroline Tee, *The Gülen Movement in Turkey: The Politics of Islam and Modernity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 119-140.

¹⁷⁴ See Gözaydın, “The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey,” 1225.

and-out terrorist organization. Saying that Atatürk was right when he closed all *tariqas* would be very simplistic. However, as I have already mentioned, many secularists had always suspected Gülen's hypocrisy and his hidden agenda. Gülen did not come up from nothing. Although he consistently declined to endorse a specific political party, former PM's from Bülent Ecevit to Tansu Çiller down to President Erdoğan and many other political leaders willingly or unwillingly supported him.

Therefore, the transformation of Gülen from being called with great respect "*Hocaefendi*" to being called a "fugitive imam,"¹⁷⁵ and his "Hizmet Movement" to "FETO" raises serious question marks. According to Filiz Başkan, a Turkish expert of political science and international relations, indeed, the "question of religious communities and their role in civil society will remain open to social hesitation and anxieties, ambiguities, mixed feelings, and political polarization among societal actors, unless democratization of state/society relations is achieved on the basis of 'secular' organization of civil society and the democratic regulations of societal affairs by the Turkish state."¹⁷⁶ Having underlined that much, and given the purpose and extension of this dissertation, I do not want to prolong this kind of political reflection. Yet to reflect on eventual relapses of this transformation in ongoing Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey, as the issue of promiscuity of religious affairs in political agendas cannot be ignored in analysis in Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey envisioned at the end of this dissertation.

According to Turkey, there seems to be enough evidence that the coup attempt was planned and put into practice by some Gülen followers. Nevertheless, the image of President Erdoğan's Turkey in recent years has evidently moved away from the rule of law principle and fundamental freedoms, the harsh measures taken after the coup d'état weakened the credibility of this

¹⁷⁵ Alkan, *July 15: Gülenist Coup Attempt*, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Başkan, "The Fethullah Gülen Community," 851.

evidence in Europe and America. Apart from a few Islamic and African countries, European countries and the US have not yet declared Gülen's network illegal as the Turkish State asked. There is no doubt that the movement, which is aware of this and has already been deeply rooted in these countries for many years, will remain persecuted in Turkey and turn into a primarily diaspora movement. This raises some questions relating to the Vatican and religious orders like the Franciscans, Capuchins, Dominicans, and Jesuits present in Turkey, which have been involved at different levels in Muslim-Christian dialogue with Gülen and some of his followers. Are they going to continue dialoging with the Gülen Movement in the diaspora despite recent events? What would be the outcome if such dialogues do continue, and the consequences for Christian communities in Turkey which are already in difficulty? In a very accurate analysis, made by Balhan,

Turkey is one of the countries in the world where people have the least confidence in one another, a population divided into groups despising each other, fearing each other, each group talking about the others but rarely to the others, whether they are "secular" Kemalists, devout Sunni, left-leaning Alevi, Kurds or Armenians. Moreover, the whole society (family, school, political parties etc.) is conservative (patriarchal, authoritarian, hierarchical and imbued with an ethics of honor).¹⁷⁷

In a country like that, where conspiracy theories can and do easily transform into accusations and incarcerations, these questions merit serious consideration. One of the issues, for instance, is the juxtaposition that some scholars make between Gülen's network and the Society of Jesus, especially in their educational missions and Muslim-Christian dialogue activities. Ahmet Insel, a very well-known Turkish academic and a columnist at *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, interviewed by

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Marc Balhan, S.J. "Turkey: Getting Out of the Vicious Circle?" *Eurcom*, September 7, 2016, <http://www.eurcom.org/turkey-getting-out-of-the-vicious-circle/>.

another Turkish journalist Neşe Düzel, says “Gülen claims that he will raise a golden generation. Here is in question an incredible Muslim Turkish elitism. Like Jesuit priests ... ‘We are going to raise a golden generation in the schools. Then this elite generation is going to dominate the world, and we are going to rule the world.’”¹⁷⁸

Gözaydın, for instance, finds the Gülen movement’s educational mission remarkably similar to the Jesuit educational tradition, and makes connections between the foundations of the Society of Jesus and Gülen’s movement.¹⁷⁹ Also Michael D. Graskemper, an American scholar very close to Gülen’s Movement, after underlining similar hopes and desires for the individual and the world that the Gülen and Jesuit educational missions have, states

These two movements share a common understanding of how God works in the world—through individuals being committed to cultivating virtues such as responsibility, love, tolerance, and service to humanity in themselves and in their students. It is this confluence, above all the others, that gives the greatest hope for cooperation and collaboration between these two educational movements. And collaboration, in the end, is the hope for the Gülen - Jesuit educational nexus; that students of the Golden Generation and Men and Women for Others will be able to help make the world a more peaceful and just home through shared dialogue, prayer, and service to humanity. A bridge to interreligious understanding, cooperation and action already exists between these two educational movements; one merely needs to find a way to cross it.¹⁸⁰

Turkish journalist Bilgin Erdoğan, instead, after underlining some similarities between Jesuits and Gülen’s network, and recalling the suppression of the Society of Jesus in the

¹⁷⁸ Ahmet Şık, *Ookitap. Dokunan yanar* (Istanbul: Postacı Yayınevi, 2011), 12.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Gözaydın, “The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey,” 1222.

¹⁸⁰ Michael D. Graskemper, “A Bridge to Inter-Religious Cooperation: The Gülen-Jesuit Educational Nexus,” in *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of Gülen Movement*, eds. Ihsan Yılmaz et al. (London: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007), 631.

eighteenth century following the suspicions “to be like a second Vatican parallel to the Vatican,” argues that as Jesuits changed their attitudes and cleared themselves in the eyes of the Vatican, they were able to have their first Pope in the Church’s history:

The fact that two different communities belonging to different groups of beliefs and coming from different periods of history share similar characteristics, led them to sharing the same fate. Therefore, there is no central structure that wants to accommodate another stricter stronger and more powerful than itself. The crisis between the Jesuits and the Vatican came to an end after many years. But the Jesuits abandoned any plan to organize and conquer the Vatican from within like other sects do. Consequently, centuries later, one of them became a Pope. So this must be the prescription in the ongoing crisis between the [Gülenists] and the government. No government will be disturbed by a Gülen Movement, which does not have a hidden agenda.¹⁸¹

As reported by Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*’s reporter Mert İnan, in the draft indictment on the structure of the FETO, prepared by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office and accepted by the Ankara 4th High Criminal Court some other connections are made. According to the indictment, in the Jesuit understanding there would be no salvation other than the Church, as in FETO there is no salvation outside of the congregation. The Gülenists, according to the indictment, have been the volunteers for the Jesuits and the church in their effort to implant Christianity into other religions and cultures. The adaptation (acculturation) for collective implantation was carried out through Gülen and his organization:

According to Jesuits, the shortest way to reach the human spirit and mind is through the active teaching of the school and the schools. [Gülenists] followed the same path. Jesuits

¹⁸¹ Bilgin Erdogan, “Cizvitler ve Gülen hareketi,” *Hilal Haber*, March 30, 2016, <http://www.hilalhaber.com/cizvitler-ve-gulen-hareketi-makale,908.html>.

have been criticized as a sect that has caused confusion almost everywhere in the world. By standing close to confessionals, they have obtained many secrets in the state affairs and tried to use them for the interests of the cult. Since the Gülen organization politically used state secrets and personal secrets, which they leaked through secret units related to intelligence and state security, they too, were declared enemies by some states (Turkey, Azerbaijan and Gambia). The Jesuits believe that the world can be changed from bottom to top, not from top to bottom. As intercultural dialogue is important for them, it is also important for [Gülenists].¹⁸²

Gülen's audience with John Paul II raised many discussions in Turkey not only among hardline secularists but also among Islamists. The secularists criticized him based on the contention, that in order to get into contact with representatives of other faiths, Gülen needed some sort of authorization, and since Gülen was not appointed by the state, he had no right to speak to someone like John Paul II on his own behalf. Radical Islamists' reaction to Gülen's visit, on the other hand, were slightly different as they considered Gülen's initiative as a humiliation. Consistent with Gözaydın those Islamists contended that a Muslim should not go and visit a non-Muslim, and they also believed that for such a prominent Muslim religious leader to visit other religious leaders would cause some Muslims to convert to Christianity.¹⁸³ After the coup attempt, that audience with John Paul II is once again at the center of attention as some prosecutors following some arguable similarities between Jesuits and Gülenists try to find connections between the failed coup and the Vatican.

¹⁸² Mert İnan, "Örgüt modeli Cizvit sembolü ise Halley," *Milliyet*, September 7, 2016, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/orgut-modeli-cizvit-sembolu-ise-gundem-2307378/>.

¹⁸³ See Gözaydın, "The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey," 1224.

5. Other Scholars Involved in Muslim-Christian Dialogue

The CC's call to dialogue has received positive responses not only from the Diyanet and Gülen's movement, but also from many Turkish universities with Divinity Schools which have been involved at different levels in its development. Therefore, without considering, even in very general terms, the views of some prominent scholars this section can't be considered complete. The majority of these scholars sees the CC's commitment to Muslim-Christian dialogue as a missionary activity, therefore to be firmly rejected or at least to be prudently taken into account.

Mahmut Aydın, a Turkish scholar, an expert in Muslim-Christian dialogue, for instance, sees the Christian invitation to the dialogue in two different categories, individual and institutional. By examining the official documents of the CC related to interreligious dialogue, Aydın concludes that it is clear that in its institutional dialogue activities, the main goal of the Church is practicing its missionary duty. The main aim of Vatican II, indeed, according to Aydın, was not really developing good relations with non-Christians, although *NA* at first sight seems to confirm that non-Christian religions are good and holy, these are good and valid as they are compatible with Christian realities. It follows that the CC "aims to present the Christian message more persuasively and present it to non-Christians by creating friendly relations, learning about them in the best way possible and after having good relations, presenting its message to them."¹⁸⁴

On the other hand Aydın privileges individual dialogue activities as they are more constructive and sincere, and considers them within three different groups: a philosophical-historical approach, according to which religions are limited by socio-cultural and some linguistic barriers and therefore they perceive the transcendental reality in different ways; a

¹⁸⁴ Mahmut Aydın, *Dinlerarası diyalog: Mahiyet, ilkeler ve tartışmalar* (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2008), 89-90.

mystical approach which focuses on the common mystical experiences in different religions in dialogue; and finally a moral-practical approach that privileges a cooperation among members of different religious traditions in order to develop peace and harmony. According to Aydın, individual scholars involved in the dialogue do not have any hidden agenda, in contrast to the institutions that generally consider themselves as the only representatives of the true religion and therefore try to convert others to their positions.¹⁸⁵

Another significant criticism coming from Turkish scholars is the belief that the CC aims to ameliorate the deteriorated image of Christians in the Muslim world because of the Crusades and other excesses they have supported in the past. According to Suat Yıldırım for instance, the Church wants to protect its existence and continue to expand itself in the world, therefore it uses dialogue as a significant tool in an attempt to improve the bad images that Muslims have of its followers and so to calm down the reactions, in order to reach its goals.¹⁸⁶

Last but not least, another significant Turkish scholar, Mustafa Alıcı, points out that one of the important issues of Muslim-Christian dialogue is being under the control and guidance of Christians, which issues in the vague and unclear definitions and classifications used by Christian scholars in Muslim-Christian dialogue activities. Consequently, Turkish scholars think that the outcomes of Muslim-Christian dialogue encounters bring results that are compatible with and are in the service of Christian goals.¹⁸⁷ Despite these negative considerations and suspicions toward interreligious dialogue with the CC, many Turkish scholars consider the dialogue necessary and encourage being part of it. However, according to them, “Muslims should be just

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 98-127.

¹⁸⁶ See Suat Yıldırım, “Kiliseyi İslam ile diyalog istemeye sevk eden sebepler,” in *Asrımızda Hristiyan Müslüman Münasebetleri*, ed. İ. Kurt (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2005).

¹⁸⁷ See Mustafa Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu: Tarihçesi, çeşitleri, hedefleri, problemleri* (İstanbul: İz, 2005).

as well-prepared as their Christian dialogue partners. The scholars also believe that Christian-Muslim dialogue should be organized by official institutions in Turkey and should be [engaged] by experts who know Christianity well.”¹⁸⁸

C) Dialoging Through Disability

Now in the last section of this first chapter I will introduce the issue of disability, which is presented in this project as a common ground through which to propose a Muslim-Christian Dialogue. After highlighting some definitions related to disability and PWD, I will offer a general picture of disability in Turkey.

1. Disability and PWD: Definitions

Along with religious issues and perspectives mentioned above, disability also has many other socio-economic, cultural aspects which are quite often interconnected. Apropos the use of terminology, for instance, such as “disability,” “disabled,” and their derivatives, it seems that regarding disability, despite the magnitude of the issue and all the efforts made by different institutions, academics and all other people studying and working on disability, there is still no consensus about what terminology is either preferable or objectionable. Disability, actually, “is a term of art with different specialized meanings, each developed for the particular policy or program that uses it. How we conceptualize disability shifts relative to the methodologies used to

¹⁸⁸ Resul Çatalbaş and Kenan Çetinkaya, “Interreligious Dialogue in the Views of Turkish Historians of Religions,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71/3 (2015): 6.

learn about it and the contexts in which it is addressed. The criteria for judging people to be disabled likewise fluctuate over time and across different social and cultural contexts.”¹⁸⁹

Just to give an example based on English terminology, we can look at the international classifications produced by the WHO (World Health Organization). The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, also known as ICF, is a classification of the health components of functioning and disability. This classification was first created in 1980 (then called the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps) to provide a unifying framework for classifying the health components of functioning and disability. In 2001, after nine years of international revision efforts coordinated by WHO, the ICF has been approved.

The classification of 1980 had used three main terms: “impairment” as any loss or abnormality of psychological or anatomical structure or function; “disability” as any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being; and finally “handicap” as a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors, for that individual. After 9 years of discussions and reflections, what has changed in the 2001 version of ICF is that disability has been established as a single common category which encompasses the terms of impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, and thus signifies the negative

¹⁸⁹ Leslie Francis, Anita Silvers, “Perspectives on the Meaning of ‘Disability,’” *AMA Journal of Ethics* 18/10 (October 2016): 1025.

aspects of the interaction between an individual with a health condition and that individual's environmental and personal factors.¹⁹⁰

However, the issues related to the establishment of the right term or the definition to use for disability and PWD, are not only semantic in nature, but also involve political, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions as well. For instance, a new regulation issued by Istanbul's Municipality in Turkey in 2015 allows families in which there is a disabled member to get fifty percent off its water bill. According to Rispler-Chaim, "the definition of 'what is disability' must always remain relative" for what is and is not considered as a disability depends on cultural criteria.¹⁹¹ Having said that, there are different approaches to disabilities, for instance medical and social approaches, with which to explain the reasons for and to deal with disabilities. The disability in question might be caused by some illness or trauma, or by the society that does not offer proper conditions for integration. In the first case we need health care providers, professionals with whom we engage for treatment and rehabilitation, while to address societal issues requires politicians, technocrats, and so on. In any case, though all these aspects are not always so clearly separated, they are interconnected:

The medical model and the social model are often presented as dichotomous, but disability should be viewed neither as purely medical nor as purely social: persons with disabilities can often experience problems arising from their health condition. A balanced approach is needed, giving appropriate weight to the different aspects of disability.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ See World Health Organization, *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)* (Geneva: WHO, 2001), 213.

¹⁹¹ Vardit Rispler-Chaim, *Disability in Islamic Law* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2007), 2.

¹⁹² *World Report on Disability*, 4; see also James Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability, Oppression and Empowerment* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach* (Basingstoke: Macmillan and St Martin's Press, 1990)

In this sense, the ICF's perspective on functioning and disability as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, both personal and environmental, works well: "Promoted as a 'bio-psycho-social model,' it represents a workable compromise between medical and social models." It follows that "disability is the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)."¹⁹³

Regarding PWD one has to keep in mind and respect all the time the fact that they are "diverse and heterogeneous, while stereotypical views of disability emphasize wheelchair users and a few other 'classic' groups such as blind people and deaf people."¹⁹⁴ Different categories of people, from a child born with anencephaly to a police officer paralyzed following a shooting, from a priest with dementia to a Paralympic athlete all can be included. Generalizations made with less care about "disability" or "PWD," therefore, can easily mislead as persons with disabilities have diverse personal factors with differences in gender, age, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ethnicity, or cultural heritage, as well as that each person can privilege her or his or personal preferences and responses to disability.¹⁹⁵

and Carol Thomas, *Female Forms: Experiencing and Understanding Disability* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

¹⁹³ *World Report on Disability*, 4.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8; see also *Learning Lessons: Defining, Representing and Measuring Disability* (London: Disability Rights Commission, 2007).

2. Disability in Turkey

From the perspective of the law, which is a very important element of defining the general situation related to disability, the Constitution guarantees “measures to be taken for children, the elderly, disabled people, widows and orphans of martyrs, as well as for the invalid and veterans shall not be considered as violation of the principle of equality” (art. 10); “minors, women, and physically and mentally disabled persons, shall enjoy special protection with respect to working conditions” (art. 50); and “the State shall take measures to protect the disabled and secure their integration into community life” (art. 61).

Moreover, the most important initiative related to disability in Turkey is the “Law on PWD,” which entered into force in July 2005. The main aims of this law are to prevent disability, to solve the problems of disabled people in the fields of health, education, employment, care, rehabilitation, and social security, to remove obstacles of disabled people, and to ensure they participate in social life and maintain their independence in daily life activities. The fact that Turkey was one of the first signatories of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and ratified it with the Law on December 3, 2008 is seen as an indication of Turkey’s interest in disability issues. There are project and monitoring reports that are developed with the aim of developing legal regulations related to disabilities, monitoring implementation and monitoring of disability rights. In this respect, the presence of a sub-commission established under the Turkish Parliament’s Human Rights Investigation Commission to investigate the rights of persons with disabilities and violations of rights is also worthwhile.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ See Aydan Oral et al., “Dünya engellilik raporu: Türkiye’de engellilik ile ilgili konuların analizi ve fiziksel tıp ve rehabilitasyon tıp uzmanlığının katkıları,” *Türk J Phys Med Rehab* 1/62 (2016): 84-85.

Since a registration system of disabled people in Turkey is still in the preparation phase there is a lack of quantitative and qualitative information about PWD. For many years, information about PWD was taken from the General Population Census of 1985 and 2000, however, it was observed that this information was not sufficient. In order to overcome the information deficiency on PWD, in 2002 the Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) carried out for the first time a nationwide Disability Survey in cooperation with the State Planning Organization and the Presidency of Administration on Disabled People. This survey, was devised to measure the number of PWD, disability proportion, their socio-economic characteristics, their problems in social life, expectations, type of disability, causes of disability and regional differences and also the proportion of population with chronic illnesses.¹⁹⁷

In the light of the results, the main characteristics of the disabled population in Turkey give the following picture: the total disability proportion in the overall population is 2.29 percent. The proportion of orthopedically, seeing, hearing, speaking, and mentally disabled people is 2.58 percent and the proportion of people having chronic illnesses is 9.70 percent. When the proportion of these disabilities is examined by age groups, it is observed that the proportion of PWD increases with aging. This is especially observed in people having chronic illnesses. While the proportion of orthopedic, seeing, hearing, speaking, and mentally disabled people is fifty-four percent in 0-9 age group, this proportion is 2.60 percent for people having chronic illnesses in 0-9 age group. While the proportion of orthopedically, seeing, hearing, speaking, and mentally disabled people is doubled in 50-59 age group, the proportion of people having chronic illnesses is approximately doubled in 20-29 age group.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ See *Turkey Disability Survey 2002*, iii-vii.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

In 2011, instead, as proposed by the World Report on Disability (WRD), the TSI conducted a Population and Housing Census (PHC) in order to provide data comparable to current internationally appropriate criteria. According to PHC, proportion of the population (three years of age and over) who have at least one type of disability (in seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, climbing stairs, holding or lifting something, learning and remembering compared to peers) is 6.9 percent. This figure is 5.9 percent for males and 7.9 percent for females.¹⁹⁹

Following indications of the WRD, the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People prepared a report entitled “How Does Society Perceive Persons with Disabilities?” The aim of this initiative was to collect comprehensive and reliable information on attitudes and behaviors toward disabled individuals at the national level and to assist in the development of national strategies to ensure positive attitudinal changes toward disability.²⁰⁰ Participants were asked whether or not they considered having a disability condition as punishment or favor or test preconditioned by Allah for the persons with disabilities. Although the participants do not think that being disabled is a punishment (92.6 percent) or favor (77.4 percent) by Allah, the rate of those thinking it is a test by Allah is significantly high (75.8 percent). It is found that the rate of those who do not think being disabled is a punishment or a favor by Allah is high, besides contradicting this finding it is also believed that it is a test for disabled persons by Allah.²⁰¹

The results of these reports give significant insights in order to understand the perception of disability in Turkey. In a nutshell, the attitudes toward persons with disabilities across Turkey were positive in general. In addition, there were some latent negative attitudes toward PWD

¹⁹⁹ See Turkish Statistical Institute, *Population and Housing Census 2011* (Ankara: TSI, 2013), 79.

²⁰⁰ See T.C. Başbakanlık Özürlüler İdaresi Başkanlığı, *Toplum özürlülüğü nasıl anlıyor?* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Özürlüler İdaresi, 2009), 191.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 266-267.

implied by the self-statements of the participants, such as the thought of persons with disabilities in a pitiable state; reluctance to contact a disabled person in social surroundings; propensity for demanding that persons with disabilities should be educated in segregated schools and classes.²⁰²

At this point of this project, after having presented the main coordinates of this dissertation, which are Muslim-Christian dialogue and disability in the context of modern Turkey, I move toward chapter II: “Muslim Perspectives on Disability: Turkish Context.”

²⁰² Ibid.

III. MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES ON DISABILITY: TURKISH CONTEXT

The word “Islam” comes from the Arabic term *aslama* which means to be saved, to surrender, to submit; to deliver, to give; make peace. Ibn Kuteybe and Ibn Manzûr, who were among the first scholars to study the etymology of the word, define Islam respectively as “to surrender and to enter into peacefulness by complying willingly” and “to surrender and to obey.”¹ Having arisen with roots in Arabia in 610 CE, Islam is believed by Muslims to be the “last of all the Divine revelations,”² and the “first and last religion.”³ The revelations from God received by the Prophet Muhammad within twenty-three years were collected into the Quran, the sacred book of Islam. This book, indeed, established the name of the religion: “This day I have perfected for you your religion, and completed My blessing upon you, and have approved for you as religion, Submission (Islam)” (Quran 5:3).

Because of its direct relationship with Judaism and Christianity, Islam recognizes a long line of prophets reported by both religions, among them Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. The latter has a particular importance and respect, even though he is not accepted as the son of God. He is revered as a prophet, “albeit of an extraordinary kind since in Islam also, he does not have a human father but is rather the ‘Spirit of God’ cast into Mary.”⁴ Muhammad is believed to be the last of this line, the ambassador of God’s final religion and law on earth. Since, according

¹ Mustafa Sinanoğlu, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 23, s.v. “İslâm” (Istanbul: TDV, 2001), 1.

² Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. “Islam” (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989), 192.

³ Sinanoğlu, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1.

⁴ Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, 192.

to the teaching of Islam, religion is a comprehensive way of life, along with faith the Quran also addresses religious and cultural regulations, which are helpful to organize both the personal and the social life of believers. These are embodied in the so-called five pillars, supports, or fundamentals of the religion, which “are accepted as such unequivocally by all branches” of Islam.⁵ The first of the five pillars, which is essential for identifying a person as a Muslim, is the profession of faith (in Turkish, *kelime-i şehadet*) expressed as “there is no god but God (Allah) and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” The other pillars are prayer (in Turkish, *namaz*) or five daily rituals; the giving of alms on a stipulated scale (in Turkish, *zekat*); fasting during the month of Ramadan (in Turkish, *oruç*), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (in Turkish, *hac*). Except for the first pillar, all the other pillars depend on the abilities of a person to perform them.

Regarding sources, law in Islam (in Turkish, *Şeriat*) was constructed by jurists using the Quran, the *Sunna* (in Turkish, *Sünnet*), analogy (in Turkish, *kıyas*), and consensus (in Turkish, *içma*), the four main roots of law. As for the Quran, the first recitation of the revelation was oral, then later, in the years following the death of Muhammad, it was written. Muslims regard the Quran as the word of God, and an uncontested source of wisdom and law, this is why it is the first and chief sources of law. Also the second source of law, the *Sunna* is given great holiness by Muslims. The *Sunna* is the tradition or legacy of Muhammad, a record of Muhammad’s sayings (*hadith*) and deeds, and of acts performed in his presence without his overt or implied objection, thus suggesting that they were legitimized by him. Muhammad’s *Sunna* today can be found in printed volumes associated with the scholars who redacted and classified them between the eighth and tenth centuries CE. Along with the Quran and the *Sunna* which are text-based sources of Islamic law, the other two sources, analogy and consensus, represent the diversity of jurists’

⁵ Ibid., s.v. “Five Pillars,” 132.

opinions since factors such as time, place, and religious liberalism or conservatism have influenced them.⁶

In Islamic law, attitudes toward PWD and to disability in general can be retrieved from the Quran, the *Sunna*, and the immense knowledge accumulated in many medieval, pre-modern, and contemporary legal compilations. There is also the *fatwa* literature, that is jurisconsultations and legal opinions, which covers a massive body of legal consultations issued from the medieval Islamic era to the present day by some jurisconsults (in Turkish, *müftü*). Contrary to the past, in which these were published in collections, newspapers, and periodicals, carrying the name of the scholar and the date of issue of his response, today they are also announced on the radio, television, and websites belonging to different fatwa committees in the Islamic world.⁷

This introduction to Islam and to the roots of its law, although in very general terms, was necessary to outline this chapter entitled “Muslim Perspectives on Disability: Turkish Context.” There are already a couple of very incisive monographs that discuss the notion of disability in the Islamic context: *Islam and Disability: Perspectives in Theology and Jurisprudence*, by Mohammed Ghaly, and *Disability in Islamic Law*, by Vardit Rispler-Chaim, which try to sketch a general picture of attitudes to disability, through theology and the law (Ghaly), and the legal literature (Rispler-Chaim). Even though for general information and notions I refer from time to time to these prominent authors, given the coordinates of this dissertation, that is, the context of Turkey, in this chapter I focus basically and primarily on Turkish-Muslim perspective on disability.

⁶ See Vardit Rispler-Chaim, “Islam and Disability,” in *Disability and World Religions: An Introduction*, ed. Darla Y. Schumm et al. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 170.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

In the first section of this chapter, I present the usage of disability in the Turkish language. This is important because classical Arabic, which is the language of Islam, is not our language, our culture, and therefore our perspectives on disability, are shaped around the Turkish language. This is why I also make a particular effort to use consistently in this dissertation, which focuses mainly on Islam and disability in the Turkish context, the Turkish versions of particular words and notions of Islamic literature. In the second section, I study disability in the Quran and the Sunna, as two major roots of the Islamic law as well as some various topics such as marriage of PWD, abortion of a disabled fetus under the perspective of Islamic law; this section is introduced by a subsection dedicated to the vision of Islam on humankind. In the third section, dedicated to Islamic Theodicy I present some perspectives concerned more with the dilemma between human suffering and existence of disabilities, and God's wisdom and justice. After examining the historical development of the theological understanding of the problem of evil I point out some reverberations of this theological journey in the socio-religious life within current Turkish society.

A) Turkish Terminology

Turkish is spoken in the territory of the former Ottoman Empire, which extends from the Balkans in the west to the Caspian Sea area in the east. Turkish is located in the Altay language branch of the so-called Ural-Altaic language family in the classification of world languages. Turks are the people who have changed their alphabet most in the world. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the Turks have been living in various regions of the world and forming various cultural circles since the very beginning. Although Atatürk's language revolution and the Turkism of Turkey tried to purify the language from words rooted in Arabic and Persian

(because of some political factors which disrupted the language revolution) they continue to form an important part of current Turkish, together with many French words. The weight of Islam, which is the majority's religion, and the Wahhabis' influence augmented especially in these last decades of Turkish political history, are some of the negative factors preventing the purification of the language. According to the third article of the current constitution, Turkish is the language of the Republic of Turkey and, as is established by the fourth article, this shall not be amended, nor shall its amendment be proposed.

Given my ethical-theological focus on disability, in order to present the interactions between Arabic and Turkish, as an introduction to the Turkish usage of disability, I would like to give an example. In classical Arabic, which is the language of Islam, there is no word that corresponds exactly to what is meant by ethics. The term that approaches most closely in modern Arabic is *khuluq* plural *akhlaq* which includes all the traits of character, moral behavior, morality, and ethics. The ethical concepts were drawn from the philosophical and medical texts of ancient Greece translated into Arabic.⁸ Concerning the Turkish language, the Arabic word *akhlaq* has been adopted by the Turkish language as *ahlak* and in interaction with *hâlk etmek* and *hulk*, which come from the same root, and respectively mean “to create” and “creation,” signifying “characteristics brought from creation.” By observing the fact that individuals who build the society have different characteristics, these are considered under *ahlak*. Social behaviors coming from some genetic characteristics are likewise considered as *ahlak*. In time, *ahlak* came to signify the social values of the individual. In other words, *ahlak* in Turkish signifies both the

⁸ Cf. Giuseppe Buono and Patrizia Pelosi, *Bioetica, religioni, missioni: la bioetica a servizio delle missioni* (Bologna: EMI, 2007), 68.

acquired behaviors and the name of a system of values accepted by the society. In this sense, *ahlak* in Turkish signifies both “ethics” and “moral” in English.⁹

In the Turkish language three different words are used to signify PWD: *engelli*, *sakat*, and *özürlü*. In the Turkish Dictionary (*Türkçe Sözlük*) issued by the Turkish Language Institution (*Türk Dil Kurumu*, hereinafter TDK) which is the official regulatory body of the Turkish language, founded in 1932 by the initiative of Atatürk, the word *engelli* is explained as “obstructed,”¹⁰ *sakat* as one who “has a sickness or incomplete side of the body, damaged or uncomplete,”¹¹ and *özürlü* as one who “has a defect or deficiency, is malformed or defective.”¹² Also TDK’s Pictorial School Dictionary (*Resimli Okul Sözlüğü*) defines *engelli* as “(1) Filled with obstacles or obstructions. (2) A person who has an incomplete or defective side of the body,”¹³ *özürlü* as “(1) One who has a defect; excused, having an excuse. (2) Defective, malformed. (3) A person who is documented by a medical report as deprived of forty percent of working power because he or she lost his or her corporal, mental, psychological, sensorial, and social skills at various levels resulting from some disease or accident,”¹⁴ and finally *sakat* “(1) One who has a sickness or incomplete side of the body, obstructed. (2) Malformed or defective.”¹⁵ Hence in the Turkish language there is no single word to signify PWD; although the words *engelli*, *sakat* and *özürlü* are generally used in Turkish society with the same meaning, the nuances put by different institutions, national and international organizations, as well as by experts and scholars of law and medicine may differ.

⁹ Berna Arda, “Etiğe kavramsal giriş ve temel yaklaşımlar,” in *Bilim etiği ve bilim tarihi*, eds. Berna Arda et al. (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi SBE, 2009), 25-26.

¹⁰ TDK, *Türkçe Sözlük*, I (Ankara: TDK Yayınları, 1998), 458.

¹¹ TDK, *Türkçe Sözlük*, II (Ankara: TDK Yayınları, 1998), 1150.

¹² Ibid., 1246.

¹³ TDK, *Resimli Okul Sözlüğü* (Ankara: TDK Yayınları, 2008), 465.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1303.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1113.

When we aim to study closely the perspective of Islam as a religion on some specific ethical argument, we should examine the above-mentioned primary sources of Islamic teaching, namely the Quran, the *Sunna* and the Islamic law. In these classical Islamic sources there is no single general term that would include all PWD as a group. This fact renders studies on Islam's perspective on disability difficult yet interesting and challenging, because the fact that no single term in Islamic sources encompasses all disabilities might in itself indicate to us something about attitudes toward the disabled in Islamic societies.¹⁶

Research on these Islamic sources, however, in utilizing some terms which are conventionally associated with disability such as *blind*, *deaf*, *lame*, *mute*, *weak*, the results are different.¹⁷ Even though most of these terms appear in the Quran in metaphorical meanings, “for example signifying people's ‘deafness’ to the law of God or ‘blindness’ to the true path” there are also some verses in which “the disability reference is probably non-metaphorical.” Furthermore, a careful reading would show that there are many provisions for exempting blind, lame, or sick people from warfare, protecting the weak-minded person from financial exploitation, and reassuring the faithful that disabled people may eat in their houses.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Vardit Rispler-Chaim, *Disability in Islamic Law* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2007), 3; see also “Islam and Disability,” 176.

¹⁷ Cf. Maysaa S. Bazna and Tarek A. Hatab, “Disability in the Quran: The Islamic Alternative to Defining, Viewing, and Relating to Disability,” *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 9/1 (2005): 10; see also Emine Gül, *Kuran'ın engellilere yaklaşımı: Kuran'da engelliler* (Istanbul: Akis Kitap, 2005), 41-42.

¹⁸ See M. Miles, “Some Historical Texts on Disability in the Classical Muslim World,” *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 6/2-3 (2002): 78.

B) Disability in the Primary Sources of Islam

Before proceeding with the study of disability in the primary sources of Islam I would like to present humankind in Islam since the perception of perfection has a particular importance in order to understand Islam's perspective on disability. "In Islam, a person's worth is based not on any physical or material characteristics but on piety,"¹⁹ which concerns primarily an authentic commitment to the above-mentioned five pillars of Islam. Therefore, the concepts of perfection and imperfection in the physical sense, as well as by extension the concepts of normalcy and abnormalcy have little application in the Islamic view of human life.²⁰

1. Humankind in the Quran

Muhammad Assad, a Muslim scholar considered one of the most influential European Muslims of the 20th century, argues that human perfection implies especially "the development of the already existing, positive qualities of the individual in such a way as to rouse his innate but otherwise dormant powers," but not "the possession of imaginable good qualities, nor even the progressive acquisition of new qualities from outside."²¹ Perfection is not to be standardized, as human beings are not little lead soldiers. Humans have individual differentiations and their duty, continues Assad, "is to make the best of [themselves] so that [they] might honor the life-gift which [their] Creator has bestowed upon [them]; and to help [their] fellow-beings, by means of [their] own development, in their spiritual, social and material endeavors. But the *form* of [one's]

¹⁹ Rooshey Hasnain, Laura Cohon Shaikh, and Hasnan Shanawani, *Disability and the Muslim Perspective: An Introduction for Rehabilitation and Health Care Providers* (Buffalo, NY: CIRRIE, 2008), 27.

²⁰ Cf. Bazna and Hatab, "Disability in the Quran," 12.

²¹ Muhammad Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1982), 21.

individual life is in no way fixed by a single standard.”²² Therefore, for a person to be worthy, the deep consciousness of God is more important than his or her physical condition. Also a hadith reported by Sahih Muslim underlines the importance of spiritual and ethical attitudes: “Verily Allah does not look to your bodies nor to your faces but He looks to your hearts.”²³

Central to a discussion on disability in the Quran is the concept of perfection from the Islamic perspective. According to Asad, “to avoid a misunderstanding, the term ‘perfection’ will have to be defined in the sense in which it is used here.” With regard to human, biologically-limited beings Asad argues that, “we cannot possibly consider the idea of ‘absolute’ perfection, because the Absolute belongs to the realm of Divine attributes alone.” Therefore, “human perfection, in its true psychological and moral sense, must of necessity have a relative and strictly limited connotation. It does not imply the possession of all imaginable good qualities, nor even the progressive acquisition of new qualities from outside.” It follows that, “owing to the natural variety of life- phenomena, the inborn qualities of man [and woman] differ in each individual case. It would be absurd, therefore, to suppose that all human beings should, or even could, strive towards one and the same ‘type’ of perfection.”²⁴

In Islam, the original nature of humans is essentially good and according to Islamic teaching people are born pure and, in the sense explained above, potentially perfect.²⁵ Human beings in Islam, indeed, are the worthiest creatures, favored “above many [God has] created” (Quran 17:70). After creating man and woman “in the most beautiful stature” (95:4), God placed them as

²² Ibid., 22-23.

²³ Abdul Hameed Siddiqui and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4 (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2003), 189.

²⁴ Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads*, 20-21.

²⁵ See Bazna and Hatab, “Disability in the Quran,” 11.

a “vicegerent”²⁶ upon the earth” and once angels complained about it by saying, “Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and call thee Holy?” God answered, “Truly I know what you know not” (2:30). Consequently, everything in the world, “all together,” has been made “subservient” unto him (45:13). Actually, the quality of man and woman to be vicegerent becomes complete only through being the servant of God, that is, obeying him. As the servant of God, the human must be passive and be able to receive the grace and bounty flowing down from the higher world. As the vicegerent of God, the human must be active on earth, maintain the cosmic harmony, and disseminate mercy because the human, as the creature possessing a central position in the earthly order, is the means through which the mercy is diffused.²⁷

The Quran narrates in a detailed way all the stages of human creation which can be enumerated as follows: (1) soil stage, (2) liquid (semen) stage, (3) leveling (forming) stage, (4) divine breathing into humans stage:²⁸ “And indeed We created man [and woman] from a draught of clay. Then We made [the human] a drop in a secure dwelling place. Then of the drop We created a blood clot, then of the blood clot We created a lump of flesh, then of the lump of flesh We created bones and we clothed the bones with flesh; then We brought [the human] into being as another creation” (23:12-14).

²⁶ The Oxford Dictionary of Islam offers the following definition: “Deputy or steward; sometimes translated as vicegerent. According to the teachings of Islam, each individual is a khalifah to God. Muslims in particular must strive to adhere to and advance God’s will by establishing a society that reflects human dignity and justice. Accordingly, human beings have been given the necessary intelligence, strength, and divine guidance to benefit humanity. Adam was the first appointed khalifah. King David is also identified by the Quran as a khalifah since he modeled his actions on God’s commands and moral laws. (2) Successor; the dynastic rulers of the Muslim empire. (3) Leader of a Sufi order.” John L. Esposito, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. “Khalifah,” (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Cf. Mustafa Naci Kula, “The Principles of Relationship Between Human and the Environment in the Quran,” *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 10/20 (2011/2): 121.

²⁸ M. Ali el-Bâr, *Kuran-ı Kerim ve modern tıbbı göre insanın yaratılışı* (Ankara, TDV, 2010), 90-91.

How long did the process of creation from the earth by divine spirit take? According to Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, who was a very well-known and respected Muslim scholar in Turkey, this question has not been answered: “What is certain is that man [and woman have] been living a long and inconvenient evolution, in which [the human] is transformed into a state of being, a state of ignorance. The answer to how this evolution evolved could be hundreds of theories. The Quran does not enter this area, which has not a practical end.”²⁹ This creation process which initiates with a draught of clay, continues with death and reaches its climax with resurrection: “He it is Who created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a blood clot. Then He brings you forth as infants, that you may then reach maturity, then that you may grow old -- though some of you are taken earlier -- that you may reach a term appointed, and that haply you may understand. He it is Who gives life and causes death” (40:67-68).

The fact that God said unto the angels to “prostrate [themselves] before Adam” (7:11) as well as he “has poured His Blessings upon” the human (21:20) is a confirmation of the worth of man and woman in God’s eyes. Anyone with the potential to be a human being, shares this status and superior position in terms of human beings, regardless of color, race, language, poverty, or richness, or whether they are healthy or disabled. In the eyes of the Quran, people are different only in their beliefs and deeds, even though they are equal in terms of rights as the Quran states “unto each are degrees in accordance with that which they have done, and thy Lord is not heedless of that which they do” (6:132). While their religious belief, their moral and intellectual qualities make a difference, their race, skin color, sex, and the languages they speak, as well as

²⁹ Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, “Kuranda insan kavramı,” *İÜİFD* 3 (2001): 8.

their being healthy or disabled do not make them, more or less, superior to each other³⁰ as “the most noble of [them] before God are the most reverent of [them]” (49:13).

Verses that talk about the primacy of human beings are considerable yet the Quran does not speak of an absolute superiority for humans.³¹ “We have favored them above many We have created” (17:70). Therefore, while God created man and woman in the most beautiful stature, He did not render them superior to all. One can ask, therefore, what does it mean that human beings are superior to many of the created, but not to all creatures? Consistent with Öztürk this signifies two things: First, that there are other creatures superior in every aspect to human beings. This is not the opposite of the Quran’s teaching because in many verses the Quran puts expressions which state the existence of conscious beings other than human beings in the universe. Second, there are other beings that carry each one of the characteristics that a human being possesses in a far more perfect way than a human.

For example, a person cannot fly like a bird, cannot be strong like an elephant, cannot see like a night butterfly, cannot find directions with a beep like a bat, cannot smell like a tick, etc. When these powers and these forces are treated one by one, they demonstrate that there are many superior assets to those of human beings, and when humans are thought of as a gatherer and integrative entity, they go immediately ahead. According to the Quran, what makes a difference are humans’ creation and ability to produce knowledge,³² and this difference is presented in the Quran by Godself: “O Iblis! What has prevented thee from prostrating unto that which I created with My two Hands?” (38:75) and “breathed into him of My Spirit” (15:29).

³⁰ Cf. Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 39.

³¹ Öztürk, “Kur’anda insan kavramı,” 13.

³² Ibid., 13-14.

While God creates human beings in a perfect way, then God “forms [them] in wombs however He will” (3:6) so among them they are also blind, lame, and sick persons (24:61; 48:17), as well as those who are “feeble-minded” (4:5) and “dumb” (2:18). Consequently, God permits that among people there are also weak people. Weakness varies; there can be weakness in the body, in the mind, in the goods, or in the community. Throughout history, one can see that the weak are abused or excluded, and that at times they want to be lifted from the social standpoint. The Quran and hadiths have revealed that it is necessary for the powerful to take care of the weak, to help them to develop themselves. Islam wants that Muslims treat women, slaves, children, PWD, limited people, and orphans with humility, to protect them, helping those who need help and support, sharing their sorrows and working to provide calm and peace.³³

2. Disability in the Quran

As mentioned above, in classical Islamic sources there is no single general term that would include all PWD as a group; however, utilizing some terms which are conventionally associated with disability such as *blind*, *deaf*, *lame*, *mute*, *weak*, the results are different. Apropos of the Quran, there are mentioned visual, hearing, speech, orthopedic, and mental disabilities and diseases. While the vast majority of the verses related to illness, sight, hearing, speech, and understanding disabilities are in the figurative sense, in physical terms, the number of verses related to disability and illness is quite limited. In this section I consider disability in the Quran from two perspectives: (1) disabilities related to sight, hearing, and speech, (2) orthopedic and mental disabilities.

³³ Cf. Resul Ertuğrul, “Kuran’a göre insanın psiko-sosyal açıdan değerlendirilmesi” (MA diss., Ankara University, 2004).

According to the Quran, there are two main reasons for disability: (1) neglect and flaws of people, (2) divine will and a test of faith.³⁴ There are several verses in the Quran suggesting that every misfortune, therefore also disabilities of all kinds, happens with God's permission, "[n]o misfortune befalls, save by God's leave" (64:11), and God permits misfortunes as a test of faith: "We try you with evil and with good, as a test" (21:35), "[a]nd We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits; and give glad tidings to the patient--those who, when affliction befalls them, say, 'Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return'" (2:155-156).

Everything that happens, even the day of death of each one, is of God's will: "It is not for any soul to die save by God's leave—an enjoined term" (3:145), "[y]et God will not grant any soul reprieve when its term has come" (63:11). God commands men and women to protect their lives and belongings, to avoid dangers, to be careful in their actions but nevertheless men and women can face misfortunes as everything is already written in a book: "No misfortune befalls the earth nor yourselves, save that it is in a Book before We bring it forth—truly that is easy for God" (57:22). On the other hand, humans ought to act responsibly, which means that they should both keep away from a completely fatalist attitude (seen in the ascription of all responsibility stemming from the self to God) and abstain from a total dismissal of God.³⁵

These and other verses, that we shall study more broadly below, are sustained also by several hadith. The following, reported by the Diyanet's scholar İsmail Karagöz, following Buhârî, and Sahih Muslim, is very significant as it puts in relation God's will and the believers' diverse attitudes toward afflictions. It is narrated that God once wanted to test a leper, a blind man, and a

³⁴ Cf. Yakup Çiçek, "İslam'ın engellilere bakışı" in *Din, felsefe ve bilim ışığında engelli olmak ve sorunları sempozyumu bildirileri*, ed. Mehmet Mazak (Istanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2012), 41-46.

³⁵ Cf. Ali Şaban Düzgün, *Sosyal teoloji: İnsanın yeryüzü serüveni* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1999), 4.

bold Israelite, so He sent an angel to each, and healed all of them. Then by giving to each a fecund cow he made them rich. After many years an angel appeared to each of them under the appearance of their previous condition, and asked them for some of their belongings for God. The leper and the bold man both lied by saying that they inherited everything and so because they did not give anything to God they returned to their previous conditions. The blind man, instead, says, “I was blind, God gave me back my sight. I was poor, God made me rich. Take whatever you wish. Upon my word, I will not speak of what you will take for God.” So the angel said, “Keep your belongings. You all were just tested. God was satisfied with you while he was angry with other two.”³⁶

a. Blindness, Deafness, and Muteness

According to the Quran, God created the heart, eyes, ears, and tongue not only to make people understand, see, hear, and speak about physical goods but also about the truth: “God brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers, knowing naught. And He endowed you with hearing, sight, and hearts, that haply you may give thanks” (16:78). The Quran talks about disabilities related to sight, hearing, and speech not only concerning this world but also concerning the Hereafter. Therefore, I will study blindness, deafness, and muteness under three categories: in the physical sense, in the spiritual sense, and in the Hereafter.

Maysaa S. Bazna and Tarek A. Hatab, two Muslim scholars both interested in the intersection of Islam and education, found that the Arabic term for “blind” and the derivatives of the root “*amiya*” occur thirty-two times in the Quran. The Arabic uses the verb *amiya* to mean “not seeing,” or “not being able to see.” The passive voice of the verb *amiya* is used in at least

³⁶ See İsmail Karagöz, *Ayet ve hadisler ışığında engelliler* (Ankara: DİB, 2005), 56-57.

nine verses to mean “was not able to see” spiritual guidance. Only three times is the word “*a’ma*” used in the Quran to refer to a person who has lost his or her eyesight (24:61; 48:17; 80:2). When referring to a person who has lost his or her eyesight, the Quran uses the word *a’ma* but not the word “*dhareer*,” which is another word that was and is still used in Arabic to mean blind in a physiological sense. In Arabic, the word *a’ma* has many usages, one of which is the person who is physiologically blind, whereas the word *dhareer* has a much more limited usage and was mainly used to refer to the person who has lost his or her eyesight. The word *dhareer* in its turn derived from the root “*dha-ra-ra*,” which implies harm or disability, whereas the word *a’ma* is merely referred to the specific condition of not seeing. Finally, in all of the rest of the verses, about twenty, derivatives of the verb *amiya* are used to refer to the loss of spiritual insight and not the loss of vision or eyesight in the physiological sense.³⁷

Concerning Turkish Quran literature, PWD are defined with two words: “*âmâ*” and “*ekmeh*.” *Âmâ* is usually used in a general sense and signifies a person who because of the complete loss of sight, will never see again. It also includes the meaning of heart blindness, a kind of spiritual blindness which also means ignorance. *Ekmeh*, instead, signifies exclusively being born blind.³⁸ The modern Turkish utilizes for both *âmâ* and *ekmeh* the word “*kör*” concerning people, and “*körlük*” meaning “blindness,” making a difference between “*doğuştan kör/körlük*” (born blind/blindness from birth) and “*sonradan kör/körlük*” or “*sonradan olma kör/körlük*” (later became blind/later blindness).

³⁷ See Bazna and Hatab, “Disability in the Quran,” 13-14.

³⁸ Cf. Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 42.

In the Physical Sense

Karagöz underlines that when blindness is mentioned in the Quran in the true sense, that is, meaning the loss of eyesight, it assumes primarily the following meanings or uses: (1) it may signify that God considers his believers according to their tendency toward God, his prophecy, and according to their faith and obedience, but not according to their disability or healthiness in respect to the physical structures, (2) it may be used as an analogy, (3) It may announce some facilitations to the believers with disabilities in complying with their religious duties, (4) it may refer to the prophet Jesus' healing blind people with God's permission.³⁹

Islam holds people responsible only for their strengths, and so "tasks no soul beyond its capacity" (cf. Quran 2:286) as God "desires ease" and "does not desire hardship" (2:185). It follows that, regarding their religious duties, blind people are responsible within their capability: "There is no fault against the blind" (24:61; see also 48:17). There are diverse opinions regarding what is meant by "there is no fault against the blind." It is narrated that in the time of Muhammad, people who were going to war were leaving the keys of their home with someone, and the needy were unsure whether they could eat such food as was offered to them from the houses of those who were away. So, when Quran 4:29 ("consume not each other's wealth falsely, but trade by mutual consents, and slay not yourselves") was revealed, PWD to whom someone had trusted their keys were unsure whether to enter those houses or not. Later God revealed to them that they could.⁴⁰ According to Emine Gül, a Turkish woman scholar focused on disability in the Quran, the fact that God takes into consideration disabled people's concerns and reveals for them a specific verse shows the importance of disabled people in the eyes of God. Thanks to

³⁹ Karagöz, *Ayet ve hadisler ışığında engelliler*, 15-16.

⁴⁰ See Gül, *Kuran'ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 45; see also Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., eds., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2015), 886.

this verse, consequently, PWD are not excluded because of their disabilities, they are not pushed out of society. This verse encouraged, and still continues to be a reference in order to expedite their socialization process in Muslim societies.⁴¹

Regarding Quran 48:17 which reconfirms 24:61 by revealing that “there is no blame upon the blind,” here the major issue is the religious responsibility of blind people. The previous verses of the same surah were condemning those who, although they were fully healthy, did not participate in war: “God will punish [them] with a painful punishment” (48:16). In order to prevent blind people and others with disabilities from sadness, thinking that they sin for not participating in war, God conceded them the license and ease to not participate in war. The moral of this verse is that the statement “there is no blame upon the blind” does not cancel the duties of a blind person, yet it lightens burdens. Bazna and Hatab point out that the second part of this verse, “Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, He will cause him to enter Gardens with rivers running below,” stresses that despite permission, it is still better for those exempted to participate within their power, in whatever form they can, such as by providing help and consultation.⁴² The fact that they cannot see some goods created by God does not mean that they do not benefit from many other blessings of God. It follows that all mentally able blind people are subject to God’s commands and prohibitions. Gül sustains this interpretation by adding that “while the Quran provides some amenities to people with sight disability in their religious duties, yet he does not waive their responsibility to be servants (*kul*). This is the reflection in the Quran of the value that God has given to visually impaired people.”⁴³

⁴¹ Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 46.

⁴² Bazna and Hatab, “Disability in the Quran,” 14.

⁴³ Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 46-47.

God's regard toward people with sight disability is also shown by another episode in the revelation of Quran 80:1-10. These verses refer to a famous incident in the time of Muhammad. As reported by the wife of the Prophet, one day Abdullah b. Ümmi Mektûm, a blind companion, went to Muhammad and kept saying, "O Messenger of God, guide me," while he was conversing with the leaders of the idolaters. Muhammad frowned and kept avoiding him, turning to others.⁴⁴ The verses are then said to have been revealed as a rebuke to Muhammad for preaching to those who had no interest in God's message, while turning away from one who sought guidance:

He frowned and turned away, because the blind man approached him. And what would apprise thee? Perhaps he would purify himself or be reminded, such that the reminder might benefit him. As for him who deems beyond need, to him dost thou attend, though thou art not answerable, should he not be purified. But as for him who came to thee striving earnestly while fearful, from him thou art diverted (80:1-10).

As is understood from these verses, Muhammad considered his preaching on Islam to the pagan chiefs to be a very important endeavor, for he expected their conversion to Islam. However God did not appreciate Muhammad's behavior and by revealing those verses made known that "the value of a sincere seeker of God, even though weak and/or disabled, is more than that of one who is heedless of God, no matter how wealthy or powerful."⁴⁵ Also Saffet Sancaklı, a Turkish scholar of Hadith at İnönü University Divinity School, points out the fact that God reveals some new verses both to rebuke Muhammad for his attitude toward a blind man and to honor a man despite his blindness, would alone also confirm Islam's position and attitude toward evaluating humankind: the real merit of people lies in the degree to which they seek the

⁴⁴ See Mithat Eser, *Engelli sahabiler* (Istanbul: Nesil, 2014), 27-30.

⁴⁵ Bazna and Hatab, "Disability in the Quran," 12-13.

truth. Indeed, the Prophet, after learning his lesson, used to lay his robe before Abdullah b. Ümmi Mektûm's feet and to tell him: "Hello, O man, for whom my Lord rebuked me!"⁴⁶

The Quran also reports some healings by Jesus where the prophet Jesus heals a man born blind and a leper. In Quran 5:110 God calls to Jesus: "O Jesus son of Mary! Remember My blessing upon thee, and upon thy mother ... and how thou wouldst heal the blind and the leper, by My leave," while in 3:49 Jesus says "I will heal the blind and the leper and give life to the dead by God's leave." According to Gül the word "blind" in these two verses corresponds to *ekmeh*, that is born blind⁴⁷ even though some opinions record that the *blind* are those who can see during the day, but not at night, or they are bleary-eyed. Most commentators, concurring with Gül's understanding, take it to refer to those who are born blind.⁴⁸

Another miracle of this kind is narrated of the prophet Jacob and his son Joseph. In the Quran the prophet Jacob is so saddened by what happened to his son Joseph that "His eyes had turned white with grief, and he was choked with anguish" (12:84). Even though the word "blind" is not used here, from the following verses it can be deduced that what is in question is blindness or at least that he had lost his sight: "[Joseph told his brothers] Take this shirt of mine and cast it upon my father's face; he will come to see.... And when the bearer of glad tidings came, he cast it upon his face and he was restored to sight" (12:93.96). These miracles show that blindness is a disease and, as is seen in some cases, it can be healed. The Quran in these miracles underscores that these healings are made by God's "leave;" it also says in another surah that "had We willed, We would have blotted out their eyes. Then they would race to the path; yet how would they see?" Even though this primarily indicates that God will make them blind to guidance and the

⁴⁶ Saffet Sancaklı, "Hz. Peygamber'in engellilere karşı bakış açısının tesbiti," *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 6/3 (2006): 51-52.

⁴⁷ Gül, *Kuran'ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 43.

⁴⁸ Cf. Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 145.

straight path, that is, in a figurative way, one can also understand it to mean that God who gives the capability to see, may also take it back as “God is the Creator of all things, and He is Guardian over all things” (39:62).

Finally, regarding physical blindness in the Quran, there are also some verses which are used by way of similitude in order to emphasize the difference between those who disbelieve and rebel against God and those who believe and do righteous deeds:

The parable of these two groups is that one blind and deaf, and one hearing and seeing (11:24).

Say, ‘Are the blind and the seer equal, or are darkness and light equal?’ (13:16).

Is one who knows that what has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord is the truth like one who is blind? (13:19).

And the blind and the seer are not equal; nor are those who believe and perform righteous deeds and the evildoer (40:58).

Regarding deafness or people with hearing impairments, the English word “deaf” in Arabic is “*asumm*.” This word in Arabic has numerous meanings and usages. In the examples given by Bazna and Hatab, for instance, an “*assum* rock” means a solid rock while an “*assum* month” signifies a period of time during which there was no war. Only one usage of the word *assum* in Arabic implies loss of the sense of hearing.⁴⁹ In the Quran the word *assum* or its plural “*summ*,” used in about 14 verses meaning closure of the ear, aggravation of hearing, or in a figurative

⁴⁹ Cf. Bazna and Hatab, “Disability in the Quran,” 16.

sense signifying a person who does not take advantage of what he or she hears.⁵⁰ Concerning the usage in the Turkish language, the contemporary Turkish uses the word “*sağır*” for people, and “*sağırlık*” to indicate the status of this disability. In a physical sense the word *sağır* is used only in the aforementioned Quran 11:24 about people who disbelieve in God and his message and fabricate lies against God (see vv. 18-22) and are spiritually blind and deaf since they cannot see God’s signs and hear his word, while others, that is, those who believe in God and act righteously are hearing and seeing for they can see God’s signs and hear his word. One can see that here also it is used in similitude and the use of the word “deaf” as a physical impairment aims toward a moral outcome.

Concerning speaking impairments in a physical sense, or mutism, muteness, the Quran uses the Arabic word “*abkam*,” which refers to a person who can speak but cannot speak well because of ignorance, cannot reason about answers, or cannot turn to his or her heart for guidance. Bazna and Hatab add that at the time the Quran was revealed, the term for a person who was born mute or who had lost the physiological ability to speak was not *abkam* but “*akhras*.”⁵¹ Spelled as “*ahraz*,” *akhras* was in use also in Turkish; however the current Turkish uses the word “*dilsiz*.”

The Quran 90:8, by listing some organs of the human body as subtle instruments from which human beings derive great benefit, also mentions speech organs: “Did We not make for him two eyes, a tongue, and two lips, and guide him upon two highways?” In the physical sense mutism or dumbness is used only in one verse: “God sets forth a parable: two men, one of whom is dumb, with power over naught, who is a burden unto his master; wheresoever he dispatches him, he brings no good. Is he equal to one who enjoins justice, and who is on a straight path?” (16:76).

⁵⁰ Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 58.

⁵¹ Bazna and Hatab, “Disability in the Quran,” 15.

In this verse are idols who are likened to a helpless and useless slave, a dumb creature with power over naught, who is nothing but a burden unto his master for the idols are unable to speak.⁵² Also here, as in Quran 11:24 regarding the blind and deaf, similitude is used, and the use of the word “dumb” as a physical impairment aims toward a moral outcome. Gül warns that in all three cases, where blind, deaf, and mute are in question in the physical sense, the related verses are not to be understood as humiliating or vilifying; God, indeed, would not despise his creatures. These verses are just determining a situation, and so use similitude (*teşbih* in Turkish) like a literary genre.⁵³

In the Spiritual Sense

In the spiritual sense, blindness indicates blindness of heart. With the Quran’s words, “hearts within breasts that go blind” (22:46), therefore they become unable to see the truth. The blindness of hearts is alluded to throughout the Quran, in addition to deafness and muteness. The Quran sees the heart as the seat of knowledge and the organ of spiritual understanding.⁵⁴ There are sixteen verses in the Quran with this connotation.⁵⁵ Here are some significant examples:

Deaf, dumb, and blind, they return not (2:18).

And they supposed that there would be no trial, and so become blind and deaf. Then God relented unto them; then [again] many of them became blind and deaf (5:71).

[...] We guided them, but they preferred blindness to guidance (41:17).

⁵² See Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 678.

⁵³ See Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*.

⁵⁴ See Nasr, 841.

⁵⁵ Quran 2:18, 171; 5:71; 6:104; 7:64; 10:43; 11:28; 22:46; 25:73; 27:66, 81; 30:53; 35:19; 41:29; 43:40; 47:23.

The first example most likely refers to the hypocrites, the following to the children of Israel to whom God sent messengers “some they would deny and some they would slay,” and the last to the tribe of Thamud to whom God sent his prophet Salih in order to show them the truth. In most of these verses one can see that, regarding spiritual insensitivity to God’s messengers, the Quran frequently refers to blindness and deafness. In some other verses⁵⁶ this spiritual blindness is said to continue in the Hereafter.⁵⁷ According to the Quran there can be both a pre-existing moral blindness and deafness that impedes an individual’s ability to be spiritually convinced and moved by God’s messages and this attitude then leads to a state of blindness:

Because the Quran indicates that all human beings were born in a state of *fitrah* -- that is, with the pure and *primordial nature from God* (30:30) -- and have an innate awareness of spiritual truth or at least of the Lordship of God (7:172), many have understood “blindness” to the truth brought by the prophets to be the result of a certain moral deformity brought about by sin and repeated moral transgression itself or the result of a Divine “curse” as punishment for sin.⁵⁸

Quran 7:179 seems to confirm this perspective: “We have indeed created for Hell many among jinn and [humans]: they have hearts with which they understand not, they have eyes with which they see not; and they have ears with which they hear not. Such as these are like cattle. Nay, they are even further astray. It is they who are heedless.” Even though cattle, which do not possess an intellect with which to understand religious truth, can be guided by the call of their

⁵⁶ See for instance Quran 17:72, 97; 20:102, 124-125.

⁵⁷ See Nasr, 315.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

herdsman, on the contrary the disbelievers described as blind, deaf and dumb may refuse to be guided at all.

The fact that the Quran used the same word “*âmâ*” for blindness in both the physical and spiritual sense, for Gül, signifies a kind of compassion toward blind people. As in the case of blindness, the Quran also mentions deafness in both the physical and spiritual sense; those who have no physical hearing issue yet close their ears to God’s and Muhammad’s call are called deaf. The reason they do not hear is because they “have a deafness in their ears” (41:44) and as they insist in their erroneous beliefs God made “them deaf” (47:23) and “has sealed their hearts and their hearing” (2:7; see also 16:108), therefore their hearts are unreceptive to truth. Those God has made deaf cannot then be made to hear, so as a consequence they escape instead of listening to God’s call: “Surely thou dost not make the deaf hear; nor dost thou make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs” (27:80).

In the Quran there are twelve occurrences⁵⁹ of this terminology, all of which refer to *kafir* (infidel), *müşrik* (polytheist) and *münafik* (hypocritical) people.⁶⁰ Here are some significant examples:

Those who deny Our signs are deaf and dumb, in darkness (6:39).

Truly, the worst of beasts in the sight of God are the deaf and the dumb who understand not (8:22).

And among them are those who listen to thee. But dost thou make the deaf to hear, though they understand not? (10:42).

⁵⁹ Quran 2:18, 171; 5:71; 6:39; 8:22; 10:42; 21:45; 25:73; 27:80; 30:52; 43:40; 47:23.

⁶⁰ Cf. Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 60.

Regarding mutes in the spiritual sense, there are four instances in the Quran; in these verses muteness signifies inability to speak about the truth of God, and a mute person who is not able to proclaim this truth: “Deaf, dumb, and blind, they do not understand” (2:171).

Blindness, Deafness, and Muteness in the Hereafter

After considering blindness, deafness, and muteness in the Quran in both their physical and spiritual senses, and before proceeding to orthopedic and mental disabilities in the Quran, I would like to mention the question of eventual disabilities in the Hereafter. The Quran in different places refers to blindness, deafness, and muteness in the Hereafter. Some people are said to be raised blind on the Last Day and in the Hereafter, even though they could see with their physical sight while alive on earth.⁶¹ “Whosoever turns away from the remembrance of Me, truly his shall be a miserable life, and we shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection. He will say, “My Lord! Why hast Thou raised me blind, when I used to see?” (20:124-125). This form of blindness is a consequence of their spiritual blindness in the life of this world as “whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter” (17:72).

In the same way, those who were deaf to the truth announced by God and his Prophet Muhammad, “when they are cast therein” will start hearing physically as “they will hear it blaring as it boils over” (67:7). This is in reference to the hideous sound that Hellfire is said to make as the disbelievers are dragged into its depths.⁶² Apropos of mutes, is said that “on that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn” (36:65). This signifies that God will give them disabilities and, as

⁶¹ See Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 807.

⁶² Ibid., 1395.

they will not be able to speak, “their tongues, their hands, and their feet bear witness against them as to that which they used to” (24:24).

Of particular significance is Quran 17:97, which takes into consideration blind, deaf, and mute all together: “Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protectors for them apart from Him. And We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection upon their faces—blind, dumb, and deaf—their refuge shall be Hell. Every time it abates, we shall increase for them a blazing flame.” According to Süleyman Ateş, a former president of the Diyanet and author of *The Holy Quran and Turkish Translation*, once again the question here is not physical blindness but blindness of the heart because those who did not see the way indicated by God in their life, will also not be able to see it once in the Hereafter.⁶³ Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian Islamic theorist, referring also to the aforementioned Quran 20:124, holds instead that those who used their eyes against the aims of creation and so did not see the verses of God, made a splurge; consequently they merit a “miserable life” and so they will be brought physically blind on the Last Day.⁶⁴

b. Orthopedic Disability

To correspond to the English word “lame” Arabic uses “*a’raj*” while Turkish uses “*topal*.” In the Quran there are two verses mentioning lame, and both of them accompanying blind and sick: “There is no fault against the blind, nor fault against the lame, nor fault against the sick” (24:61; see also 48:17). As already considered above in reference to blind in the Quran, also here in question are religious duties and some amenities provided in situations of war or pilgrimages because of some physical impairment. Lame people were excused from going to war since they

⁶³ See Süleyman Ateş, *Kuran-ı Kerim tefsiri*, v. 3 (Istanbul: Yeni Ufuklar Neşriyat, 1988), 1543.

⁶⁴ Cf. “Fi Zilal’i Kuran tefsiri,” <http://www.muhabbetullah.com/kuran/tr/>.

had permanent impairments and war is a difficult situation. Both Surahs criticize those who did not do their duties, although they had no impairment. However the Quran, which judges responsibility in proportion to men and women's abilities, by excusing lame people from participation in the jihad, here offers some ease and permission.⁶⁵

Mithat Eser, a Turkish Muslim scholar who collected hadith related to the companions, disciples, scribes, and family of Muhammad with various disabilities, narrates that a companion by the name of Amr b. Cemûh was an old man partially lame in one leg. After converting to Islam in Medina he wanted to participate in the battle of Uhud as his sons were preparing to fight. The sons were not agreed as he was quite old, weak as well as lame. Amr went to Muhammad who asked the sons to let him fight. Amr and one of his sons defended Muhammad during the battle as they were close to him, and they finally fell martyrs on the battlefield.⁶⁶ These verses remove also any superstitious notions that people might attach to PWD, often leading to their exclusion from social life; by doing so, the Quran reverses many of prevailing customs, even in our days, toward PWD and once again urges their inclusion in society.⁶⁷

c. Mental Disability

In the Quran mental disability is expressed in both true and figurative senses through the words "*mecnun*" and "*sefih*." The first term is used in two different meanings. In the first of them the Quran mentions defamations made against the messengers of God: "And they say, 'O you unto whom the Reminder has been sent down, truly you are possessed'" (15:6; see also 44:14 and 68:51). The Quran states that this charge that Muhammad was possessed is also directed

⁶⁵ See Gül, *Kuran'ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 70.

⁶⁶ Mithat Eser, *Engelli sahabiler*, 127-29.

⁶⁷ Cf. Bazna and Hatab, "Disability in the Quran," 17.

against the other prophets by the people to whom they were sent, as in 51:52: “Likewise, there came no messenger unto those before them, but that they said, ‘A sorcerer or one possessed’” or in 26:27: “[Pharaoh said,] ‘Truly your messenger who has been sent to you is possessed!’” or in 7:66-67 which brings the story of Hud, an Arab prophet whose descendants are of Noah through the latter’s son Sam: “The notables among his people who disbelieved said, ‘Truly we think that you are foolish, and we consider you to be among liars.’ He said, ‘O my people! There is no foolishness in me, but rather I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds.’” God himself denies these accusations, as in 52:29: “So remind, for thou art not, by the Blessing of thy Lord, a soothsayer or one possessed,” or in 81:22: “[He] is not possessed.”

The second term used aims to protect people with mental disabilities as they cannot make proper decisions in civil and business relationships. The Quran suggests for them guardians:

[If] the debtor is feeble-minded or is weak, or is unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate justly (2:282).

[G]ive not the feeble-minded your property, which God has placed in your hands to manage, but provide for them and clothe them from it, and speak unto them in an honorable way (4:5).

The feeble-minded here refers to dependents unable to care adequately for themselves or manage property. Some have suggested that the feeble-minded here refers to women and minors, who should not be entrusted with property, lest they lose or corrupt it; or some others suggest that it refers only to those whose mental condition requires their confinement.⁶⁸ In any case the verse is not seen to vilify but protect them.⁶⁹ In the figurative sense, as in the case of blind and

⁶⁸ See Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 191.

⁶⁹ Cf. Karagöz, *Ayet ve hadisler ışığında engelliler*, 33.

deaf people, it refers to those *kafîr* (infidel), *müşrik* (polytheist) and *münafik* (hypocritical) people, who cannot use their mind to understand the truth that announced: “Truly the worst of beasts in the sight of God are the deaf and dumb who understand not” (8:22) as “they have hearts with which they understand not” (7:179). Like infidels, polytheists and hypocritical ones, also Jews worshipping the calf, the *jinn*s,⁷⁰ as well as those who kill their own children are called fools or feeble-minded.⁷¹

3. Disability in the Hadith

The sources say that Muhammad related to PWD, was interested in them, valued them, solved their problems, and consoled them when necessary. Therefore, there are several authentic traditions from the Hadith concerning those with disabilities or disabling illnesses, as well as their possible treatment or recommended behavior.⁷² As reported by Sancaklı, Muhammad on several occasions underlined the importance of life and health, and encouraged believers to ask God for forgiveness and health, because apart from faith humans have not been given anything better than health. He used to invite people to pray to God insistently for health of body, eyes, and ears. He considered well-being and leisure time as two blessings that most of the people fail to use. He invited people to appreciate the value of youth before reaching old age, health before

⁷⁰ The Oxford Dictionary of Islam offers the following definition: “Creatures known in popular belief in pre-Islamic Arabia and mentioned numerous times in the Quran, parallel to human beings but made out of fire rather than clay. Believed to be both less virtuous and less physical than humans, but like humans, endowed with the ability to choose between good and evil. In folk religion, jinn are spirits invoked for magical purposes and are often held responsible for miraculous or unusual events and for a wide range of illnesses, which are popularly believed to be caused by an imbalance between internal and external jinn. Healers often speak directly to jinn prior to driving them out of patients.” Esposito, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. “Jinn.”

⁷¹ Karagöz, *Ayet ve hadisler ışığında engelliler*, 34.

⁷² See Miles, “Some Historical Texts on Disability,” 81.

getting some diseases, wealth before experiencing poverty, leisure time before being busy, and life before reaching death.⁷³

These traditions, which are scattered in different hadith sources and are not collected together under the title of the book, further elaborate how Islam accounts for those who have some disabilities and therefore need particular attention. There are some significant episodes to enlighten Muhammad's behavior toward PWD. We have already mentioned incidents with the blind companion Abdullah b. Ümmi Mektûm, reported in the opening verses of Quran 80, and another companion, Amr b. Cemûh, with an orthopedic handicap, who although not obliged because of his disability, chose the path of perseverance and so was allowed by Muhammad to join the war and was martyred on the battlefield. It is said that when Amr b. Cemûh asked Muhammad if he would be able to walk with his own feet in Heaven, Muhammad replied, "yes,"⁷⁴ and when he met him during the battle, told him, "I may well see you walking in heaven with a healed leg."⁷⁵ This attitude of Muhammad toward Amr has been seen by many as an encouragement to maintain the same attitude toward PWD. The happiness of Amr at the moment of Muhammad's response confirms the fact that the promise for a whole and healthy existence in the Hereafter may have a positive effect on believers with disabilities. On the contrary, those who do not believe in the Hereafter, may have more difficulties dealing with their disabilities.⁷⁶

Muhammad employed the visually impaired Abdullah b. Ümmi Mektûm as a muezzin in the Masjid al-Nabawi and, when he left Medina for some reason, 13 times asked him to lead the prayers in his place. Like Amr b. Cemûh, so also Abdullah b. Ümmi Mektûm, (despite the verse of the Quran which states that those who actually participate in the war are superior to those left

⁷³ Sancaklı, "Hz. Peygamber'in engellilere karşı bakış açısının tesbiti," 49-50.

⁷⁴ Eser, *Engelli sahabiler*, 127-128.

⁷⁵ Sancaklı, "Hz. Peygamber'in engellilere karşı bakış açısının tesbiti," 52.

⁷⁶ Cf. Eser, *Engelli Sahabiler*, 129.

behind, though the ones with disabilities were kept out of this rule) wanted to fight for Islam and fell a martyr during a war. According to Eser, the determination of various provisions in Islam related to PWD has been possible thanks to Abdullah b. Ümmi Mektûm because Muhammad allowed him to be his deputy, exercising the role of imam, participating in war and in mandatory prayers, and even having a dog for protection purposes. Among these provisions the fact that Muhammad allowed Abdullah b. Ümmi Mektûm and other visually impaired people to lead in mosque prayers is particularly significant.⁷⁷ The fact that Muhammad employed some PWD giving them some significant office like deputies, governors, imams, etc., therefore demonstrates their employability and capabilities, and should be taken into account in our days too.⁷⁸

Muhammad, indeed, is said to have tried to build a society in which believers respect each other regardless of their abilities. He considered the believers to be a united body in loving each other and having mercy, and when any limb is disturbed, the other limbs become disturbed and suffer for it. Muhammad, by willing to give guidance to blind people, to talk to the deaf and mute in an intelligible way, to help them get their needs out of the way, to rush to help the poor who were looking for help, to help speechless people to express better their will, and all kinds of charity, encouraged believers to help each other both materially and spiritually.⁷⁹

Muhammad also gave great importance to the education of PWD as well as others without any disability. Relying on the verse “Hast thou seen the one denies religion?” (107:1), he privileged profession of faith in one God and behaving in ordinary life according to the faith professed. People who have no disability should observe and think about the situation of their

⁷⁷ Ibid., 164-165.

⁷⁸ Cf. Ramazan Ayvalı, “İslamda engellilerle ilgili bazı hükümlerin değerlendirilmesi” in *Din, felsefe ve bilim ışığında engelli olmak ve sorunları sempozyumu bildirileri*, ed. Mehmet Mazak (İstanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2012), 118.

⁷⁹ See Sancaklı, “Hz. Peygamber’in engellilere karşı bakış açısının tesbiti,” 55-56.

disabled companions, and while avoiding discrimination, should find out how to help them. Muhammad also used to rebuke those who blocked the ways of blind people, and cursed those who deliberately led them to the wrong path. It is narrated, indeed, that after the invasion of Mecca, Ebubekir carried his old and blind father Ebû Kûhâfe on his shoulders and brought him to the presence of Muhammad. Disturbed by this behavior, Muhammad told Ebubekir, “it would be better if we went to him rather than bringing him to us.”⁸⁰ If Ebubekir and others close to him were better educated and more sensitized toward their disabled companions or relatives, he would have not disturbed Ebû Kûhâfe in that way. On the other hand, PWD have to be educated without any discrimination since Islam requires education for both men and women without any limitation.⁸¹

Islam defines itself as a religion that makes human life easy because God does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear (cf. 2:286). Therefore, in the case of disabilities, for believers there are numerous simplifications in the Quran, in the Hadith, and in Islamic Law based on the first two sources or developed subsequently starting from them. Regarding the month of Ramadan and fasting, the Quran provides other days for those who are “ill or on a journey,” because “God desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you” (2:185); “He has placed no hardship for you in the religion” (22:78); “God desires not to place a burden upon you, but He desires to purify you, and to complete His Blessing upon you” (6:6). Consequently, the religious duties of PWD related to worship differ from those of people with no disabilities. Along with the Quran, numerous hadith pointed out some facilitations for those with some weakness or disability.

⁸⁰ Eser, *Engelli sahabiler*, 134-135.

⁸¹ Alparslan Özyazıcı, “Engelliler ve genetik problemler,” *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* 161 (2004): 20.

According to Sancaklı, who considers “Islam the last and most appropriate religion,”⁸² Islam has produced reasonable solutions for physical and mental disabilities. Islam does not stress the power of the person, and the principle of convenience comes into play in every difficulty encountered. The loss of power caused by disabilities was taken into consideration in the obligations of PWD and in parallel to this, many facilitations were provided. Hence through special provisions for PWD, they were given the opportunity to do their worshipping within the pre-established time-frame. In the law books, indeed, provisions regarding the facilitations for sick and disabled people are often found along with different argumentations and also sectarian views.

As narrated by Anas bin Malik, for instance, Muhammad said, “Make things easy for the people, and do not make things difficult for them and give them glad tidings and do not repel them.”⁸³ On another occasion, according to what is narrated by Abu Hurairah, a Bedouin stood up and started urinating in the mosque. The people caught him but the Prophet ordered them to leave him and to pour a bucket or a tumbler of water over the place where he had passed the urine. The Prophet then said, “You have been sent to make things easy (for the people) and not sent to make things difficult for them.”⁸⁴

Apropos of *namaz*, for instance, one of the five pillars of Islam, as narrated by Mahmud bin Rabi Al-Ansari, a companion by the name of Itban bin Malik used to lead his people (tribe) in prayer and he was a blind man. He said to Allah’s Messenger, “O Allah’s Messenger! At times it is dark and flood water is flowing (in the valley) and I am a blind man, so please offer prayers at a place in my house so that I can use it as a *Musalla* (praying place).” So, Allah’s Messenger

⁸² Sancaklı, “Hz. Peygamber’in engellilere karşı bakış açısının tesbiti,” 60.

⁸³ Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahîh Al-Bukhâri. Arabic-English*, vol. 1 (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 1997), 97 [Book 3, chapter 11, n. 69].

⁸⁴ Ibid., 174 [Book 4, chapter 58, n. 220].

went to his house and said, “Where do you like me to pray?” Itban pointed to a place in his house and Allah’s Messenger offered the prayer there.⁸⁵ Or on another occasion, to Imrân b. Husayn, who had several illnesses and was particularly disturbed by hemorrhoids, having difficulty in bowing at prayer due to his disability, Muhammad suggested he pray standing, in case that was not possible, to pray sitting, and in case that was also not possible, to pray leaning.⁸⁶ Or as reported by Sancaklı to another person who complained about his inability to learn by heart the Quranic verses because of the weakness of his memory, Muhammad taught him how to absolve his praying duty through repeating a simple prayer: “My God! Have pity on me, forgive me and lead me to the correct way.” After this man left Muhammad’s company, Muhammad told others, “If this man will do what I told him, he will fill his hands with goodness.”⁸⁷

Apropos of another pillar, *hac* (pilgrimage to Mecca), Quran 3:97 says “Pilgrimage to the House is a duty upon humankind before God for those who can find a way.” Sancaklı interprets “those who can find a way” as *istitâa*, that is, physical and financial sufficiency. Physical competence also requires that there are no significant mental or physical barriers. In the same way fasting is mandatory for healthy people.⁸⁸

In cases of mental illnesses similarly, regarding some religious duties such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and zakat, Islam allowed various conveniences and licenses to the disciples who, although they have mental abilities, but because of some disease or accident have lost their physical, sensual, or emotional abilities to some degree. By taking away responsibility from three categories of people, namely, youth until puberty, the sleeping until he or she wakes up, and the

⁸⁵ Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahîh Al-Bukhâri*, vol. 1, 381 [Book 10, chapter 40, n. 667].

⁸⁶ See Eser, *Engelli sahabiler*, 175.

⁸⁷ Sancaklı, “Hz. Peygamber’in engellilere karşı bakış açısının tesbiti,” 61-62.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

mentally sick until he or she is healed, Muhammad introduced a general principle for those with inadequate intelligence, thus indicating that mental retardation is exempted from worship.⁸⁹

4. Disability from a Legal Capacity (*Ehliyet*) Perspective

As I have tried to demonstrate so far, both the Quran and the Hadith introduced many facilitations for believers with disabilities, in their religious duties as well as their participation in the social life. Especially the *Sunna*, which contain the tradition or legacy of Muhammad, offer a variety of easements and encouragements. In light of the latter considerations I made above regarding people with mental illness and Muhammad's position on the responsibilities of some categories of weak people in Islamic society, such as children until puberty, one sleeping until he or she wakes up, and the mentally sick until he or she is healed, I consider important for this dissertation a focus on the legal capacity of PWD from the perspective of law. Given their moral and ethical implications, and their weight in social life, particular attention will be given to two important issues closely related to one's legal capacity, namely, the marriage of PWD and abortion. As was said by Vardit Rispler-Chaim, a professor of Islamic Law at the University of Haifa, disability seen primarily as a medical problem, may turn easily into a social problem, especially when the handicap is noticeable or when it disturbs the functioning of the individual within society.⁹⁰

The ability to acquire rights and exercise them and to accept duties and perform them is explained in the dictionary as "competence, convenient, being suitable and adequate," as a term of law, the legal capacity (in Turkish *ehliyet*). Legal capacity is divided into two types. Capacity

⁸⁹ Ibid., 60-61.

⁹⁰ Vardit Rispler-Chaim, "Islamic Law of Marriage and Divorce and Disabled Person: The Case of the Epileptic Wife," *Die Welt des Islams* 36/1 (1996): 90.

to receive or inhere rights and obligations, referred to as *ahliyyah al-wujūb* (in Turkish, *vücub ehliyeti* - the capacity for acquisition), and capacity for the active exercise of rights and obligations, which is referred to as *ahliyyah al-adā'* (in Turkish *edâ ehliyeti* - the capacity for execution or performance of duties). Every person is endowed with legal capacity of one kind or another. The capacity for acquisition is the ability of the individual to receive rights and obligations on a limited scale. The capacity for execution enables one to fulfil rights and obligations, to effect valid acts and transactions with full responsibility toward God and one's fellow human beings. The causes affecting capacity are found in those factors that prevent capacity for acquisition and capacity for execution from taking full effect. The existence of these factors may result in the total absence of capacity or in deficient or incomplete capacity. Natural causes of defective capacity are childhood, insanity, dementia, forgetfulness, sleep, unconsciousness, slavery, fatal illness, menstruation, puerperium, death.⁹¹

All PWD, whether their disability is physiological, mental-neurological, or physical, are provided with *vücub ehliyeti*. It follows that, as human beings they merit to be respected and to enjoy needed cure as well as any rights such as subsistence (in Turkish: *nafaka*), and inheritance (in Turkish: *miras*). Apropos of *edâ ehliyeti*, instead, it is not possible to establish a generalized rule; therefore there is need to consider particular cases one by one. According to Mehmet Erdoğan, a professor of Islamic Law at Marmara University Divinity School, those who have a mental disability and suffer from a disease that completely removes the power of appeal such as insanity or Alzheimer, are not provided with *edâ ehliyeti*. So it follows that they are incapacitated and have no legal capacity and cannot use civil rights or assume contractual

⁹¹ See Ahmet Özdemir, "İslam hukukunda unutkanlık edâ ehliyeti üzerindeki etkileri," *Turkish Studies* 8/12 (2013), 979.

responsibilities. All they may need is to be provided and all legal acts in their names are to be made by their tutors or guardians.⁹²

Those who have a mental disability yet possess a partial power of appeal, for instance people with partial dementia, instead, enjoy a limited *edâ ehliyeti*. Likewise, though they do not have legal capacity yet they can be corrected, that is, if they commit a penal act they do not go to prison but are rehabilitated in reformatories. They are considered partially incapacitated, and acts in their favor, for instance receiving a gift, are valid, while the acts not in their favor, for instance making a charitable donation, are not valid. The validity of some acts like buying and selling, which can be in their favor or not, depends on the confirmation of their tutors or legal guardians.

The question of possessing *edâ ehliyeti* or not depends on the characteristics of diseases. According to Erdoğan, for instance, people with autism (*tevahhud*) do not have *edâ ehliyeti*; the *edâ ehliyeti* of those who have Down Syndrome (*mülâzeme davn*) depends on the level of their mental balance. In the case of those who suffer from cerebral palsy (*şelel dimâğî*) there would be three different outcomes depending on certain impediments which affect their cerebral functions. Where there is a disability that incapacitates their cerebral functions they have no *edâ ehliyeti*; where their cerebral functions are stable yet they have physical spasms, their *edâ ehliyeti* depends on whether the spasms impede their responsibilities and they are considered excused (*mazur*). Those who suffer from epilepsy (*sara*) lose their *edâ ehliyeti* during their epilepsy crisis; however, right after, if they possess full power of appeal, they have *edâ ehliyeti*.⁹³

Finally, concerning those who may possess power of appeal but have physical disabilities such as hearing impairments, blindness, or are orthopedically disabled, they have both *vücub* and

⁹² Mehmet Erdoğan, “İslam hukukunda engelliler: Engelliliğin fikhî ve hukukî sorunları,” in *Din, felsefe ve bilim ışığında engelli olmak ve sorunları sempozyumu bildirileri*, ed. Mehmet Mazak (İstanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2012), 170.

⁹³ Ibid., 171.

edâ ehliyeti. If they have difficulties in fulfilling their duties, some facilitations are provided. For example, they still have to fulfill their religious duties such as *namaz*, fasting, alms (*zekat*), and pilgrimage (*hac*). However, if they cannot make ablutions with water they can use sand or soil (*teyemmüm*), or if they cannot do the pilgrimage they can send some other believer on behalf of themselves, and so on. In the case of testifying, if their contribution requires auditory or visual abilities then they cannot witness. These are legally pursuable yet, if their disability conditions do not permit them to serve a sentence, some facilitations are provided.⁹⁴

a. Marriage

Islamic legal attitudes toward handicaps affecting marriage are different from those toward handicaps in other fields of life, personal or public, in which a handicapped Muslim participates or is involved, such as prayer, fasting, holy war, leading the community, etc.⁹⁵ Already both in the Quran and in the Hadith are certain facilitations and concessions for those who cannot endure the full physical effort, of such religious duties for instance, although they require some bodily fitness, because they involve a certain physical effort in addition to spiritual intention and Quranic recitation. In marriage, instead, because of numerous ethical, moral, and social implications, the existence of a handicap cannot be ignored: “Integrity of the body, primarily its external appearance, but also its faculties, and especially its sexual ability, is essential for the validity of the contract.”⁹⁶

In Islamic law, those with mental disability, which annihilates power of appeal, cannot marry *in propria persona* as they don’t possess *edâ ehliyeti*, however they can be married through their

⁹⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁹⁵ See Rispler-Chaim, “Islamic Law of Marriage and Divorce,” 99.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 99-100.

tutors or legal guardians. In that case, factors such as defrauding the counterpart, not clearly informing him or her about one's disability status or the level of aggressiveness of the person in question, and the mental health status of the counterpart are taken into account. If both parties have any mental disability they cannot be married.⁹⁷ The fact that the couple are both healthy enough to be able to engage in physical and emotional intimacy as well as in sexual intercourse "whenever the husband wishes," appears more central than bearing a child. The human body, therefore, exercises a crucial impact on various aspects of marriage.⁹⁸ It follows that "[h]andicapped people may encounter difficulty in finding a suitable spouse (*kafa'a*); and a healthy spouse who becomes handicapped during marriage may face the demand for divorce by the other spouse, if the marital contract is believed to be breached by the disability."⁹⁹

Concerning the interactions of Islamic teaching on marriage and disabled person, the Ottoman Decree of Family Law (*Osmanlı Hukuk-i Aile Kararnamesi*) of 1917 on the one hand restrained the authority of a coercive tutor or a legal guardian and established that male minors under the age of 12 and female minors under the age of 9 can be married by no one (art. 7); but on the other hand left the decision about the marriage of a mentally disabled man or woman to the permission of a judge (art. 9).¹⁰⁰ Currently, the Turkish Civil Code (TCC) in art. 133 sets out that "mentally ill" persons cannot marry unless it is understood by an official medical board report that there is no medical obstacle to that person's marriage. Art. 145 of TCC, instead, mentions the conditions when a marriage is null and void. The instances where one of the spouses has "inability of judgment" due to an ongoing situation or has a "mental illness which is severe and thus disables the person from marriage" are among the circumstances which make a

⁹⁷ Erdoğan, "İslam hukukunda engelliler," 172.

⁹⁸ Cf. Rispler-Chaim, *Disability in Islamic Law*, 47-48.

⁹⁹ Rispler-Chaim, "Islamic Law of Marriage and Divorce," 99-100.

¹⁰⁰ Erdoğan, "İslam hukukunda engelliler," 172.

marriage null and void. With regard to those under guardianship, the validity of a marriage is open to scrutiny if the guardian raises the issue in court that the minor and/or the adult under legal guardianship married without the consent of her or his guardian.

b. Abortion of a Disabled Fetus

As for the religious judgment on abortion, Islamic jurists are basically divided into two groups. According to the first group which makes up the majority, abortion is not possible (*cā'iz*) at any stage of pregnancy. While according to others, abortion in the early stages of pregnancy is not prohibited (*harām*); according to some representatives of this group, abortion is reprehensible (*makruh*), while for others it is allowed (*mubah*). The majority of jurists agree that to perform abortion in the absence of medical and religious directions is homicide. This judgment has its foundation in the general principles and particular judgments inherent in some chapters of the Quran and the sayings attributed to Muhammad.¹⁰¹ In fact, in the Quran there are no specific references to abortion but in two verses in two different chapters there is a very clear message:

And slay not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Surely their slaying is a great sin (17:31).

Likewise have their partners made the slaying of their children seem fair unto many of the idolaters, that they may ruin them and confound them in their religion. Had God willed, they would not have done so. So leave them and that which they fabricate (6:137).

¹⁰¹ Antuan Ilgit, S.J., “Statuto giuridico del nascituro e aborto procurato in Turchia laica e musulmana,” *Studia Moralia* 51/1 (2013): 111.

Broadly speaking, early jurists were in agreement that abortion was forbidden after 120 days of pregnancy, by which time the so-called ensoulment had already taken place. Concerning abortion within the first 120 days, the opinions expressed commonly can be summed up into three or four main categories: unconditionally permissible; permissible if there is an excuse; generally reprehensible; and forbidden. Each of these opinions has its own advocates among modern Muslim jurists.¹⁰² For these jurists, the fetus becomes a living being, depending on the school, either after the 120th or the 40th day of pregnancy, while before these periods the inanimate or indefinite fetus would still await the ensoulment or animation. This situation of uncertainty combined with the need to make judgments on abortion has prompted officials to distinguish between abortions performed in the first phase, that is, (again, depending on the school) prior to 120th or 40th day as blameworthy and those practiced in the second, that is, after the 120th and 40th day as prohibited.¹⁰³

However, it is not so easy to predict the likely opinion of those early jurists who permitted abortion when there was an excuse. Would having a disabled fetus be a sufficient excuse for terminating the pregnancy? According to Ghaly we must refer to modern jurists who have had to address this new situation:

Two main factors played a central role in the formulation of fatwas on this subject: the duration of the pregnancy and the seriousness of the defect or disorder that the potential child would suffer. The majority keep the two factors in view and thus permit abortion in case of extreme and incurable disorders as long as it takes place before 120 days and, according to

¹⁰² Cf. Mohammed Ghaly, *Islam and Disability: Perspectives in Theology and Jurisprudence* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 122.

¹⁰³ Ilgıt, “Statuto giuridico del nascituro,” 115.

some, not before forty days. [S]pecific disorders such as blindness and deafness are explicitly excluded from the acceptable excuses.¹⁰⁴

Erdoğan suggests that the best thing would be to consider abortion not possible (*cā'iz*) at any stage of pregnancy. However, he says that, if there is a risk for the health of the mother, abortion should be possible without looking at the stage of ongoing pregnancy. Likewise, in the case where there is certainty that, when the child will grow up it will not have sufficient power of appeal in order to self-manage itself, the decision should be entrusted to competent physicians. This decision is an obligation for the potential child, his or her family and humanity: "Human beings in their quality of God's caliphs on the earth, have to take responsibility regarding the future and the destiny of humanity, and so have to intervene in case of negative goings-on."¹⁰⁵ This last position *in se* and in its possible and inevitable extensions however, brings out a critical question: in a case of living mentally disabled children and adults what should be done? Therefore, we stand with those Muslim jurists whose stance is summed up by Ghaly as follows: "First, every human being is God's creation and no one may 'play God' and decide to terminate another human life. Second, happiness and the quality of life are subjective terms and no one can speak for another."¹⁰⁶

Concerning reverberations of Islamic teaching on abortion in Turkish society, current legislation and general religious opinion established by the Diyanet in Turkey can be summed up as follows: According to the current Turkish juridical system, a fetus, if born alive, gets legal rights from the moment it comes into contact with the birth canal. The recognition of this right has a conditional character and a retroactive effect. Turkish legislation recognizes the right of

¹⁰⁴ Ghaly, *Islam and Disability*, 122-123.

¹⁰⁵ Erdoğan, "İslam hukukunda engelliler," 173.

¹⁰⁶ Ghaly, *Islam and Disability*, 123.

women to terminate the pregnancy before the tenth week of pregnancy. It is allowed to proceed to the interruption of pregnancy after its tenth week only in the case of certain medical conditions which jeopardize the life or integrity of one of the mother's vital organs, or the health of the unborn child. While Turkish law allows abortion until the tenth week, the religious authority does not consider abortion lawful when procured without reasons of risk to the health of the mother and/or the unborn child.¹⁰⁷

C) The Problem of Evil and Disability

For believers, evil is a problem in which a contradiction is involved between evil on the one hand, and belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other. God cannot be both all-powerful and perfectly good if evil is real.¹⁰⁸ In Western religious literature afflictions encountered in the universe have been generally classified in two major categories, namely, "physical" and "moral" evil. Physical evil is involved in the very constitution of the earth and the animal kingdom; in various natural calamities such as fires, floods, tempests; in various numbers of diseases such as cancer; as well as in various physical deformities and defects with which so many are born or are faced at some moments of their earthly lives, such as misshapen limbs, blindness, deafness, dumbness, mental deficiency, and insanity. Moral evil, instead, is immorality -- evils such as selfishness, envy, greed, deceit, cruelty, and larger scale evils like wars and the atrocities they involve.¹⁰⁹ Some scholars add a third type of evil, that is,

¹⁰⁷ Ilgıt, "Statuto giuridico del nascituro," 123. See also footnote n. 27 for a complete list of medical conditions that jeopardize the life or integrity of one of her vital organs, or the health of the unborn child, and thus allow the interruption of pregnancy after the tenth week of pregnancy.

¹⁰⁸ See H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 10/39 (April 1960): 97.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 98-100.

metaphysical evil, which is separated from the other two by its structure, and primarily points out the finiteness and limitness of the created universe.¹¹⁰

Regarding Islam, some writers hold that “Islam, in contrast to Judaism and Christianity, has paid little attention to the problem of theodicy, understood as the problem of showing how the suffering of good men [or women] is to be reconciled with the love of God for [humans].”¹¹¹ On the contrary, some Turkish Muslim scholars argue that God’s creation of, and foreknowledge about, imminent affliction and suffering raise serious theological and ethical questions for Islam, because that appears to contradict God’s justice and boundless benevolence. In the history of Islamic thinking, the problem has been addressed and discussed in all its aspects,¹¹² and Muslims were not only interested in the problem, but unlike Christians and Jews, they also resolved it as “the resolution of these problems is only in the wisdom of true Islam.”¹¹³ Their reflections were around such questions as “What is good and evil?” “What kind of relationship is there between them?” “Does evil depend on the act of the person, or is it put as an ore in the creation?” This theological challenge has generally been addressed in one of two ways – through reflection on the ontology of evil and the inherent goodness of the world or through reflection upon human suffering as a manifestation of both divine will and human will.¹¹⁴

This theological challenge is also reflected in different views regarding both how suffering should be experienced and how it should be responded to:

¹¹⁰ Cf. Cafer Sadık Yaran, *Kötülük ve theodise: Batı ve İslam din felsefesinde “kötülük problemi” ve teistik çözümler* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 1997), 26.

¹¹¹ Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, “Suffering in Sunnite Islam,” *Studia Islamica* 50 (1979): 5.

¹¹² See Mehmet S. Aydın, *Din felsefesi* (Ankara: Selçuk Yayınları, 1992), 148.

¹¹³ Murtaza Mutahhari, *Adl-i İlâhi*, trans. Hüseyin Hatemi (İstanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 1988), 5-6.

¹¹⁴ See Scott J. Fitzpatrick et al., “Religious Perspectives on Human Suffering: Implications for Medicine and Bioethics,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 55 (2016): 11.

There are, for example, Muslim traditions that encourage acceptance of suffering on the grounds that suffering is divinely ordained. Other traditions advocate confronting suffering in all its forms. Those traditions that emphasize the divine ‘purpose’ of suffering have, in some Muslim communities, encouraged skepticism of both curative and palliative medicine on the grounds that illness might be a form of divine mercy intended to expiate a believer’s sins, and that God is the only healer in whom true believers should place their trust.¹¹⁵

According to one tradition, for example, the Prophet is reported to have said: “No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he received from a thorn, but that God expiates some of his sins for that.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, this tradition reports the Prophet explaining that illness has a religious purpose and that through the experience of illness or suffering a patient might earn merit and attain the status of a true believer: “Abu Hurairah [Muhammad] said, ‘If Allah wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials.’”¹¹⁷

1. Some Anti-Theodicy and Pro-Theodicy Approaches

Ghaly explains that the anti-theodicy theological approach which stresses the perfect character of God can be seen especially in God’s self-sufficiency and omnipotence. In the case of disabilities and other afflictions, “judging God’s acts in accordance with the same criteria used for judging human acts would diminish God’s unlimited power and thus tarnish His perfect character. In this sense, no attempts should be made to search for wise purposes (*hikam*) for

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁶ Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahîh Al-Bukhâri*, vol. 7, 307 [Book 75, chapter 1, nn. 5641-5642].

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 308 [Book 75, chapter 1, n. 5645].

God's acts, including pain and all that can be deemed evil.”¹¹⁸ This approach was mainly theorized in the *Eş'arî* (or *Asharis*)¹¹⁹ school according to which the source of all kinds of disabilities is God. All kinds of affliction, misfortunes, and disabilities happen in connection with God's divine justice and wisdom. Therefore, neither questions such as, “Why does disability exist?” “What is wisdom that stands behind it?” nor reflections on these topics are appropriate. Everything in this world, including human beings, belongs to God, they are God's property.¹²⁰ It follows that God can make use of them however God wishes, thus human beings have not to question God and God's acts: “What humans perceive as causation, they believed, is actually God's habitual behavior.”¹²¹

One of the towering personalities of this school is Gazzâlî (d. 505/111), who by refusing the concept of a universe full of evil, holds that among all possible universes this one is the best, the most beautiful and the most complete one.¹²² Gazzâlî affirmed that God can inflict pain on humans without giving any hope of reward and for no reason. In this way, all kinds of misfortunes, sufferings, evils in general, and all disabilities in particular, are to be tracked back

¹¹⁸ Ghaly, *Islam and Disability*, 24.

¹¹⁹ The Oxford Dictionary of Islam offers the following definition: “Classical Sunni theological school (tenth to twelfth centuries), founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari, that became an important religious movement forming a middle ground between the rationalism of the Mutazilis and the literalism of the Hanbalis. Used a rational approach to religious truth but preserved the primary importance of scriptural revelation as the sole source of certainty. Acknowledged that reason may play a role in defending truth, convincing others, and participating in moral actions, but held that all moral actions are governed by God. Associated with the Shafii school of law. Assimilated into the Maliki school of law in the tenth century. Opposed by Hanbalis in the eleventh century.” Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. “Asharis.”

¹²⁰ See Harun Işık, “Engellilik sorununa kelami bir yaklaşım,” *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 17/57 (2013): 13-15.

¹²¹ Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Biomedical Ethics: Principles and Application* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 97.

¹²² Yaran, *Kötülük ve theodise*, 153-172.

to God: “The question then is: why does God create and will all these evils? What is the wise purpose (*hikma*) behind all this? Where is the justice of God in this case?”¹²³

The proponents of the pro-theodicy approach, instead, argued that the divine perfection of God’s character is to be measured by God’s oneness and justice, wisdom and solicitude for the welfare of God’s creatures. With the intention to save God’s justice or wisdom, they hold that, humans “because of [their] freedom to act in life, [are] the agent of a large part of the evil and pain in this life.... God is not responsible for these evils and cannot be questioned for their existence in our life.”¹²⁴ However they consider another part of human suffering, such as being afflicted by disabilities, in other words physical evil, as beyond human choice, and therefore coming from God as a test of faith. *Mu’tezile* (or *Mutazilis*)¹²⁵ are identified with this approach. They consider disability from a bi-dimensional perspective. The first dimension concerns human intuitive reasoning expressed in religious maturity. This human intuitive reasoning “is capable of discovering the rational core of every circumstance and event. Accordingly, God must have the best interests of his creatures at heart when he permits suffering.”¹²⁶ This point of view leads to the second dimension which is related to God and consists in the perception of disability as a grace given to a person with disability, his or her loved ones, and finally to the society in which

¹²³ Ghaly, *Islam and Disability*, 25.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹²⁵ The Oxford Dictionary of Islam offers the following definition: “Eighth-century theological school that emphasized God’s absolute uniqueness, unity, and justice. Also known as Ahl al-Adl wa’l-Tawhid (People of Justice and Unity). Rejected anthropomorphism. Taught that the Quran was created rather than eternal. Preached human free will as a rational depiction of good and evil; preached harmony between human reason and revelation. Opposed the Ashari opinion that God’s command is the sole criterion for determining the correctness of an act. Taught instead that the command by itself is insufficient as an agent for action. Additional factors, such as the nature of the agent issuing the command and the consequences of the act for the receiver of the command, must be taken into account. Use of logical arguments, materialism, and rationalistic ethics contributed to the development of philosophical methodology in Islamic theology.” Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. “Mutazilis.”

¹²⁶ Sachedina, *Islamic Biomedical Ethics*, 96.

he or she lives. According to the *Mu'tezile* this whole group of people will get benefits both in this world and in the Hereafter, if they are patient and submissive.¹²⁷

Finally, there is also a middle approach, identified in so-called *Maturidiyyah*¹²⁸ thought and shared by the majority, which tried to find a middle way between the previous two approaches. In their understanding, God is the creator of all kinds of disabilities, whether these are from birth or happened thereafter, and in any case, there would be absolutely an explanation related to God's knowledge, might, justice, and wisdom. On the other hand, the human mind which is limited, is not capable enough to understand the wisdom hidden within the acts of God who is perfect and limitless in all God's attributes. If this human imperfection were recognized, there would be no problem in efforts made to understand and to interpret the divine wisdom that stands behind all disabilities. According to the proponents of this middle approach, an investigation on divine wisdom, made by placing the Quran, the *Sünnet* and the human reason in the center, and the results of this investigation are important for PWD. The latter, indeed, can reap benefits for their inner peace in relation to their concept of God (*tasavvur*), life vision, and hope for the Hereafter.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Cf. Işık, "Engellilik sorununa kelami bir yaklaşım," 7-13.

¹²⁸ The Oxford Dictionary of Islam offers the following definition: "Sunni theological school founded in the tenth century in Transoxiana by Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Maturidi. Closely linked to the Hanafi school of Islamic law. Combined Sufi meditational and ethical exercises for emotional and spiritual awareness with correct external ritual and social behavior and the use of reason to understand religious truths. Stressed God's omnipotence, unity, and uniqueness, as well as the primal authority of the Quran, but also allowed for human freedom of will. Opposed to a literal interpretation of the Quran and anthropomorphism. Believed in assured salvation for those who sincerely fulfill their religious obligations as described in the Quran and Sunnah." Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. "Maturidiyyah."

¹²⁹ Işık, "Engellilik sorununa kelami bir yaklaşım," 15-18.

2. Cafer Sadık Yaran and Quranic Theodicy

Before proceeding with the investigation about the problem of evil from a disability perspective, I consider complementary to what has been presented so far about the Islamic reflections on the problem of evil and suffering, a contribution of a prominent Turkish-Muslim scholar on this topic. Cafer Sadık Yaran has engaged in studies on the philosophy of religions, logic, ethics, and Islamic philosophy. In his well-known book, *Kötülük ve theodise: Batı ve İslam din felsefesinde “kötülük problemi” ve teistik çözümler* (Evil and Theodicy. The “Problem of Evil” and Theistic Solutions in Western and Islamic Philosophy of Religion). Yaran argues that the problem of evil in Islamic thought has not been such a big and unresolvable question, nor has it occupied as great a space, as it has in Christian thinking. In any case this does not mean that the problem of evil has not been discussed in Islamic thinking.¹³⁰

Yaran’s focus on what he calls Quranic Theodicy gets our particular attention because it concerns closely this research. According to Yaran, there is no explicit theodicy in the Quran, but only an implicit one. Rather than theodicy, there are answers and explanations that shed light on debates about suffering and grief.¹³¹ On the same page with Mahmoud M. Ayoub, a Lebanese scholar and professor of religious and inter-faith studies, Yaran argues that the Quran is not interested in theodicy, but in human attitudes or responses to God’s acts in nature and history. The Quran also is not interested in logic and justification, but in the dynamic relationship between humankind and God. It is for this reason that no single answer can be given to the problem of evil and suffering in human society.¹³² According to Yaran the answers given by the

¹³⁰ Yaran, *Kötülük ve theodise*, 111-112.

¹³¹ Ibid., 124.

¹³² Ibid., 113; see also Mahmoud M. Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” *Journal of Dharma* 2 (1977): 276.

Quran concerning the problem of evil, and topics related to theodicy can be studied under four major titles, namely, a test of faith and education of the believer, the misuse of human will, discipline and punishment, and finally the Hereafter as the home of justice.

Concerning a “test of faith and education of the believer,” Yaran argues that the most obvious answer is that suffering is sometimes a test of faith. This answer relates directly to man’s and woman’s trust in God’s omnipotence and omniscience, God’s justice, mercy, and love. To the unavoidable question, “Why and for whom are human beings tested?” Yaran answers that, the test, first of all, is for those who are tested; and therefore, is useful for them. Secondly, it is for all others who are not tested, since it is also beneficial for them. People in the first group being tested through afflictions and evil are educated and matured spiritually, morally, and psychologically; suffering creates true humility, gives patience, gratitude, and compassion. People in the second group benefit from the same outcomes, and learn to empathize with those who are afflicted, to help them.

In regard to the “misuse of human will,” Yaran points out Quran 3:165 which states, “And when an affliction befell you ... did you say, ‘Whence is this?’ Say, ‘It is from yourselves.’” Starting from this verse Yaran argues that the afflictions that happen to believers are a consequence of their misusing their will as they choose to follow a way contrary to their mind, faith, and agreements. In a nutshell, the genesis of affliction is misuse of the human will; the genesis of this misuse is the fact that human beings have been created in great measure free; and the genesis of this freedom is God.¹³³ Apropos of “discipline and punishment,” Yaran points to the disasters caused by God in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran following the morally evil deeds of human beings such as the stories of Noah, Lot, Moses, and Pharaoh: “We wronged

¹³³ Yaran, *Kötülük ve theodise*, 123-129.

them not, but they wronged themselves” (Quran 11:101). Along with Ayoub, Yaran interprets history as God’s court of justice and the instrument of His discipline. It may be argued that, even in the strict justice of God, His mercy is manifest, and therefore, the examples of the severe punishments of bygone generations must serve as lessons for those who follow, so that they may be spared the fate of their predecessors.¹³⁴

Finally, regarding “Hereafter as the home of justice,” Yaran argues that, even though in this world wrongdoers and sinners seem to live in happiness and prosperity, according to the Quran their states are not eternal; their punishment may be postponed. However, the final justice will be after death when bad people will get their punishment and good people their recompense and they will be rewarded for their good deeds.¹³⁵

From the perspective of the Quranic theodicy defined by Yaran, the cause of both physical and moral evil, and afflictions cannot be imputed to only one reason. Especially physical evil and the consequences of natural disasters are necessary instruments in order to test, to educate, and to mature believers; without those instruments the outcomes cannot be reached. In some particular cases, they can also be considered as a reminder, discipline, or punishment. Concerning moral evils, they are likewise a result of the human situation and so they are caused by the misuse of human will. In any case, the sufferings and afflictions that cannot be justified fully in this world will certainly find their recompense in the Hereafter.¹³⁶

In the history of Islamic thinking, as happens also for many other Islamic topics, discussions and reflections on human suffering find their central points in verses of the Quran. Even though

¹³⁴ Ibid., 129-132.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 132.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

there are some differences in their points of view both Sunni and Shia expressions of Islam in their answers to the problem of evil and human suffering center on the Quran:

[I]n both expressions of Islam, the far more general response to suffering has been to reiterate the Quran and apply it to whatever new circumstances of suffering arise, and that has remained true down to the present day. It is, of course, exactly what would be expected, since in Islam there has been nothing like the re-evaluation of the concepts of inspiration and revelation, or of their connection with history and time, as there has been in Christianity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the same Quranic attitudes reappear as much in the present as in the past.¹³⁷

In any case the new instances of suffering which occurred without being mentioned in the Quran might be considered from this “the Quran writ large in life” criteria, because when provoked by those instances Islam considerably extended its reflection mostly through Hadith which is largely deterministic.¹³⁸

3. Disability from a Quranic Theodicy Perspective

At this point of the dissertation, following Yaran, I would now like to focus more on Quranic Theodicy from a disability perspective. Disability status, indeed, does inevitably create suffering for the people involved. When human beings are forced to confront the suffering, they often turn to God in a matter that transcends themselves. Therefore, while the disabled individual and his or her environment try to understand the state of disability, they usually question God’s role, and the reasons behind their or their loved ones’ disability. At the same time, in the effort to

¹³⁷ John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 133.

¹³⁸ See *ibid*, 127.

overcome the problem, some behavioral styles such as asking for God's help and strength to overcome this problem can be realized. For this reason, religion and religious sources are important references when confronted with some disability.¹³⁹

As mentioned above, for Muslims the Quran is a foundational source for their belief system, therefore, what the Quran says about any religious or ethical issue -- in this case disability and human suffering -- is regarded as an authentic perspective on Muslim belief. In the matter of suffering, "an examination of the Quran reveals both a 'naturalistic' account of the vulnerability of human life in threatening environments (such as the desert) and a philosophical account of the complex interaction between the divine and human wills both in relation to the cause and meaning of suffering and its relief."¹⁴⁰

In the Islamic tradition, suffering or affliction caused by events that lead to some form of harm or loss, is often discussed in the light of Islamic belief about the omnipotent and omniscient God. It is not so uncommon, therefore, to hear Muslim believers in Turkey express their sympathy for a loss, a case of disability, or an illness by saying: "*Demek ki Allah böyle istedi ve böyle oldu,*" "*Allah büyüktür,*" "*Allah rızası için tevekkül ediyorum,*" that is, "so that is what Allah wanted and it happened so," "Allah is great," "For the sake of Allah I put myself in Allah's hands." However, as it imputes evil to God, this statement and its variations create a theological problem. In other words, both the Quran and Muslim traditions treat suffering as both an inevitable aspect of human experience, and as a problem of faith or theodicy, as it is ultimately the Almighty Creator who causes evil or suffering.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ See Mustafa Naci Kula, *Bedensel engellilik ve dini başa çıkma* (Istanbul: DEM, 2005), 27.

¹⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick et al., "Religious Perspectives on Human Suffering," 10-11.

¹⁴¹ See *ibid.*, 11.

What is the take of the Quran on disability from a perspective of suffering? How does the Quran explain the existence of a disability and PWD? As studied above, apropos of disability the Quran does not explain distinctly the reasons of disability or why God created PWD. In order to understand this very specific topic we must deduce specific conclusions from general information given by the Quran.¹⁴² According to the Quran disability can be either caused by human error and neglect, and/or can be considered as a test.

a. Disability as a Consequence of Human Error and Neglect

In this regard, the following verse of the Quran has been central for theological reflections related to the problem of evil in general and to disability in particular. The verse questions, “How will it be when misfortune befalls them because of what their hands have sent forth?” (4:62). The idea that the judgment wrongdoers receive in the next life is the result of “what their hands have sent forth,” is repeated numerous times¹⁴³ in the Quran to emphasize that human beings are solely responsible for their fate in the Hereafter. Here, however, the suggestion is that “the misfortunes generated by their wrongdoing might also be visited upon them in this life,”¹⁴⁴ that is, “people might sometimes be responsible for their own suffering.”¹⁴⁵

There are many other verses to sustain this position: “Whatsoever misfortune befalls you is because of that which your hands have earned” (42:30). Here misfortune is understood as a general reference to all afflictions which may befall human beings, similar to 4:79: “Whatever good befalls thee, it is from God, and whatever evil befalls thee, it is from thyself.” Some consider that it may also be a specific reference to the punishments for violations of Islamic Law.

¹⁴² Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 99.

¹⁴³ Cf. Quran 2:95; 5:80; 8:51; 18:57; 59:18; 62:7; 78:40; 82:5; 89:24.

¹⁴⁴ Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 220-221.

¹⁴⁵ Fitzpatrick et al., “Religious Perspectives on Human Suffering,” 11.

They say, in this sense, the small afflictions one bears are seen as alleviating the burden of sins for which one would have to pay a greater price in the Hereafter.¹⁴⁶

Or, “And when We cause the people to taste some mercy, they rejoice in it. But should an evil befall them because of that which their hands have sent forth, behold, they despair” (30:36). People rejoice in their blessings, which they believe are a testament to their own superiority, as in 39:49, “And when harm befalls man [and woman], he [or she] calls upon Us. Then, when We confer upon him [and her] a blessing from Us, he [or she] says, ‘I was only given it because of knowledge.’” The idea that the judgment wrongdoers receive in the next life is the result of the deeds of disobedience that their hands have set forth is seen by some as a reinforcement of the idea that human beings are responsible for their fate in the Hereafter. On the other hand, it is suggested that the misfortunes generated by their wrongdoing might be visited upon them in this life.¹⁴⁷

Another verse announces that, “[W]hosoever does a mote’s weight of good shall see it. And whosoever does a mote’s weight of evil shall see it” (99:7-8). Some scholars understood “shall see it” as in this world and in the Hereafter, and interpret it to mean that, while nonbelievers will get recompense of their good deeds in this world, and will be punished in the Hereafter for their evil actions, the believers, instead, will be punished in this world for their evil deeds, and get their recompense for their good deeds in the Hereafter: “As the reparations of missing things in this world will be made in the Hereafter, likewise will be also asked account of superfluities. It

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 1182.

¹⁴⁷ See *Ibid.*, 992-993.

follows that, if necessary, the lords of this world will be servants in the Hereafter, and servants will be lords.”¹⁴⁸

One of the fundamental questions asked by people who face some afflictions, in our case PWD, is “whence is this?” The genesis of this question is the curious character of human beings who generally question and try to make sense of what is going on in their world. By asking this question or its variations the individuals on one hand try to understand the affliction that occurred in their life, and to make sense of it, and on the other hand, through the answers that they could or could not get, they try to deal with their situation.¹⁴⁹ Gül addresses the issue through Quran 3:165, “And when an affliction befell you, though you wrought an affliction twice its like, did you say, ‘Whence is this?’ Say, ‘It is from yourselves,’” which refers to the war of Uhud where believers were afflicted. The main reason of this affliction is that the fighters during the war wanted to share the trophy, and so they disobeyed Muhammad through faltering or pursuing the spoils or by running away. Disobedience to Muhammad’s commands was a mistake and this is why they were afflicted. Consequently, when they were asking, “whence is this?” Muhammad was told to answer, “it is from yourselves.”¹⁵⁰

God creates in man and woman a power to act along with the ability to make a choice between right and wrong. God is the creator of actions and men and women are the acquirers. An event initiated with God’s permission is completed after the correspondence with the involvement of man’s and woman’s choice. It follows that, as acquirers, men and women are

¹⁴⁸ İlyas Çelebi, “İslam itikadı açısından engelliliğin dini boyutu” in *Din, felsefe ve bilim ışığında engelli olmak ve sorunları sempozyumu bildirileri*, ed. Mehmet Mazak (İstanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2012), 100.

¹⁴⁹ Mustafa Naci Kula, “Engellilik ve din,” *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* 5 (2004): 4.

¹⁵⁰ Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 101.

responsible for whatever they do and so will be answerable for their deeds.¹⁵¹ Consequently, afflictions and misfortunes can happen to people because of misuse of their mind and free will. However, sometimes it happens that afflictions occur even when all the people involved did not behave mistakenly. In the case of Uhud, in fact, the war was considered won until some fighters, disobeying Muhammad, started leaving their positions. It follows that some people can suffer because of mistakes made by others; the same thing may happen in urban traffic when a driver, infringing the established traffic code, causes an incident which results in some death or disability.¹⁵² Some scholars argue that disasters are given as either an element of test or a punishment of our evil deeds.¹⁵³

Consider the idea of test in the following: Apropos of punishment, it is true that there are many verses which clearly announce a forthcoming punishment in the Hereafter for evil deeds committed in this world. However, there are no verses which state strictly that there would be a direct punishment in this world. This kind of interpretation, in any case, might be possible by taking into account some Hadith aimed at explaining verses such as Quran 4:23, “Whosoever does evil shall be requited for it.” Rather than a punishment, it might be more appropriate to consider such afflictions a benefit for believers. It is, indeed, announced that in exchange for patience sins will be forgiven, ranks and rewards will be gathered ahead: “No calamity befalls a Muslim but that Allah expiates some of his sins because of it, even though it were the prick he receives from a thorn.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Cf. Asma Hussain Khan, “The Problem of Evil: Islamic Theodicy” (proceedings of SOCIOINT14 – International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities, Istanbul, Turkey, September 8-10, 2014), 1123.

¹⁵² Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 101-102.

¹⁵³ Cf. Lütfullah Cebeci, *Kuran’da şer problemi* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınevi, 1985), 309.

¹⁵⁴ Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahîh Al-Bukhâri*, vol. 7, 307 [Book 75, Chapter 1, n. 5640].

Quran 17:15 says, “Whosoever is rightly guided is only rightly guided for the sake of his own soul, and whosoever is astray is only astray to its detriment. None shall bear the burden of another.”¹⁵⁵ This means that the consequences of one’s moral actions and one’s state of guidance or misguidance ultimately devolve upon oneself and that no one assumes the burden of another.¹⁵⁶ Consequently, no one is disabled because of the sins of his or her parents or other family members, since all must bear the consequences of their own actions. A child can bear a disability caused by a mistake of his parents, for instance, following a car accident caused by his or her father driving drunk; however, a sin of a family member cannot be considered as a cause of another family member’s disability.

In this regard, Quran 5:90’s admonishment gains a particular importance: “O you who believe! Wine, and gambling, and idols, and divining arrows are but a means of defilement, of Satan’s doing. So, avoid it, that haply you may prosper.”¹⁵⁷ Some accounts report that this verse was revealed after some of Muhammad’s companions became drunk and while fighting each other injured seriously one of themselves.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, addictions such as consuming alcohol, use of drugs, or gambling should be avoided. The same consideration applies to smoking. Although its forbiddenness is questioned among Islamic thinkers, its burdens to human health are quite confirmed by positive sciences, and may result in some amputations, that is some disabilities.¹⁵⁹

Another reason for Muslims to believe that behind every affliction there is not a concrete sin or misbehavior relies on the affliction which happened to the prophets Eyyûb and Yakub. Gül

¹⁵⁵ See also Quran 35:18; 5:105; 6:31; 52:162.

¹⁵⁶ See Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 699.

¹⁵⁷ See also Quran 2:219.

¹⁵⁸ See Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 323.

¹⁵⁹ Gül, *Kuran’ın engellilere yaklaşımı*, 104.

reminds us that prophets are given a capacity to avoid sins and whenever they risked committing an error they were admonished by a revelation. Therefore, the reason for which they were afflicted was their being exemplars and leaders. In effect with their behavior in the face of affliction they showed to humanity the sustainability of suffering and pain.¹⁶⁰

b. Disability as a Test of Faith

The idea that disability is given by God as a test of faith for the believer finds its foundation in Quran 57:22-23 which states, “no misfortune befalls the earth nor yourselves, save that it is in a Book before We bring it forth -- truly that is easy for God -- that you not despair over what has passed you by, nor exult in that which He has given unto you.” This passage suggests that all things have been recorded in “a Book,” therefore, “God is omniscient and has the foreknowledge of suffering”¹⁶¹ because He created it. One of the major outcomes of this perspective based on the recognition of the omniscience of God, is that Muslim believers should accept whatever happens to them as “no misfortune befalls, save by God’s leave. And whosoever believes in God, He guides his heart. And God is Knower of all things” (64:11).

The fact that, “no misfortune befalls, save by God’s leave” confirms the abovementioned common cultural attitude of passiveness in the face of afflictions, but it also generates patience in the face of suffering through the knowledge that this suffering is ordained, is always temporary, and is, in some sense, purposeful.¹⁶² As is made clear in Quran 2:155-157: “And We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits; and give glad tidings to the patient -- those who, when affliction befalls them, say, ‘Truly we are God’s, and

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 101-103.

¹⁶¹ Fitzpatrick et al., “Religious Perspectives on Human Suffering,” 11.

¹⁶² Ibid.

unto Him we return.’ They are those upon whom come the blessings from their Lord, and compassion, and they are those who are rightly guided.”

Quran 91:7-8 states “by the soul and the One Who fashioned it and inspired it as to what makes it iniquitous or reverent. Indeed, he prospers who purifies it,” can be read as an indication that God decrees all things for each human being, but also as a proof that human beings are created with both positive and negative aptitudes, with the result that they can easily incline to good as well as to evil. Having these aptitudes given by God they can be subjects of a test. The following verses confirm:

Truly We created man [and woman] from a drop of mixed fluid that We may test him [and her], and We endowed him [and her] with hearing, seeing (76:2).

He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth and raised some of you by degrees above others, that He may try you in that which He has given you (6:165).

The aptitudes of hearing and sight, indeed, are necessary for the test, as they make humans capable of obeying or disobeying. Those who do not use them properly “have eyes with which they see not, and they have ears with which they hear not” (7:179; see also 7:198; 10:43). Therefore, physical nature, that which comes from a drop of mixed fluid, is created for the purpose of being tested and tried.¹⁶³

God tests believers in their faith,¹⁶⁴ as “for the man [and woman] of faith, the old question of undeserved suffering is the real test.”¹⁶⁵ Yaran sees the test as something related to the trust of believers in might, knowledge, justice, mercy, and also in the existence of God. In this vein, the

¹⁶³ See Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 1452.

¹⁶⁴ Cebeci, *Kuran’da şer problemi*, 131.

¹⁶⁵ Mahmoud M. Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” *Journal of Dharma* 2 (1977): 276.

most important test would consist in maintaining faith, avoiding negative thoughts when the faith is questioned by believers themselves or others.¹⁶⁶ According to the Quran faith and test are complementary, that is, one cannot subsist without the other: “Does [hu]mankind suppose that they will be left to say, ‘We believe,’ and that they will not be tried, though We have indeed tried those who were before them?” (29:3).

A profession of faith made only through words is not enough for God; God tests believers in their deeds, too.¹⁶⁷ The purpose of this test is to provoke in believers a regret followed by repentance: “See they not that they are tried each year, once or twice; yet they neither repent nor take heed?” (9:126). Attitudes of believers when something “has passed [them] by,” as well as when something “[God] has given unto [them]” (57:23) constitute the test in their deeds. They should not be angry at life but preserve their faith and hope as has already been observed. All this suffering is ordained, is always temporary, and is also purposeful (see 2:155-157). Apropos of attitudes to have when facing some suffering, patience and gratitude are considered proper responses for all that God bestows. Since the Quran reveals that “the life of this world is naught but the enjoyment of delusion,” (57:20) believers should avoid despairing over what has passed nor exult in worldly achievements or possessions, since at the end of the day “all things perish, save His Face” (28:88; see also 17:67; 30:33; 39:50). Following the revelation that everything is going to perish, Ayoub considers death as the final test that every living creature must undergo:

Yet even this unquestionable fact is invoked against [humans’] tendency to self-righteousness in blaming the calamity of an individual on others or in regarding it as just punishment of the individual’s sin. In the verse just cited, it was Muhammad who was blamed for the death of martyrs in battle. In answer, he is commanded to say, “...everything is from God.” Man [and

¹⁶⁶ Yaran, *Kötülük ve theodise*, 119.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Cebeci, *Kuran’da şer problemi*, 131.

woman] should not seek reason for the misfortunes of others, or deride them for their disabilities.¹⁶⁸

In the final analysis, the test that believers are given aims to educate and adorn them with virtues such as patience, gratitude, and humility. As human beings are given free will, they have the capacity to decide for themselves. In some people, this ability is stifled due to two reasons, either their arrogance or their sinful past. This is why believers continue to be educated and instructed; prophets over prophets, some higher in rank than others, were sent for the purpose:¹⁶⁹ “We sent no prophet to a town but that We seized its people with misfortune and hardship, that haply they would humble themselves” (7:94). The sending of a prophetic messenger is often accompanied by some form of adversity, such as poverty, hunger, illness, and various forms of loss for the people as a moral test. In some cases, the test consists of an alternation between “hardship and ease” (7:95), since God tries people with good and bad fortune to stimulate both humility and gratitude.¹⁷⁰

Patience at all times and gratitude for everything, says Ayoub, should not mean inactivity and detachment from this world, but a humble acceptance of God’s will and the dynamic hope and trust in God’s mercy. The other side of humility, indeed, is not only pride, but despair which shows up in terms of engendering ingratitude for God’s blessings: “If We cause man [and woman] to taste Mercy from Us, and then withdraw it from him [and her], verily he [and she are] despondent, ungrateful” (11:9). This attitude is caused by lack of a sufficient amount of hope in God, and reliance upon Him. Another reason subsists in being impatient; therefore, it is expected that in such circumstances believers be patient, hopeful, trustful that God perhaps will return to

¹⁶⁸ Ayoub, “The Problem of Suffering in Islam,” 276.

¹⁶⁹ See Khan, “The Problem of Evil: Islamic Theodicy,” 1123.

¹⁷⁰ See Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 440.

them whatever He withdrew from them, and maybe the new gifts will be more perfect, more tremendous than they were before. The outcome of this attitude, finally, will result in humility.

c. Divine Preordainment and Disability

Quran 57:22-23 reported above, suggests that all things have been recorded in a Book and so God is omniscient and has the foreknowledge of suffering, finds its reverberations in some Hadith, too. It is narrated by Aisha that once she asked Muhammad about a plague which happened in a town, and Muhammad replied

that was a means of torture which Allah used to send upon whom-so-ever He wished, but He made it a source of mercy for the believers, for anyone who is residing in a town in which this disease is present, and remains there and does not leave that town, but has patience and hopes for Allah's reward, and knows that nothing will befall him except what Allah has written for him, then he will get such reward as that of a martyr.¹⁷¹

The suggestion that all events of this earth, among which are misfortunes and afflictions, have been already recorded "in a Book" (cf. 20:52; 22:70), or on a "Preserved Tablet" (85:22), or as it is said in the Hadith, "Allah has written" about, make a problem for someone who asks what then would be the importance of human beings' free will? While Ayoub answers the question by saying that "with such a positive and fully involved attitude towards life, the Quran can hardly be accused of fatalism,"¹⁷² John Bowker, a professor of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, argues that a fatalistic and indifferent attitude to the occurrence of suffering is

¹⁷¹ Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahîh Al-Bukhâri*, vol. 8, 327 [Book 82, chapter 15, n. 6619].

¹⁷² Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," 279.

ruled out by the Quran itself. The reason for which this point of view has long dominated popular piety as well as theological thinking lays behind the socio-political and economic vicissitudes of the Muslim society's history rather than the teaching of the Quran.¹⁷³

Also Ali Yıldız Musahan, a Turkish-Muslim scholar at Iğdır University Divinity School, points out that, when the relationship between misfortune and the divine preordainment (*kader* in Turkish) is in question, we should not think about *kader* as something mandatorily unavoidable. *Kader*, instead, should be understood from a three-dimensional perspective consisting of the creation project of humankind, events that befall us outside of our will, and volitional acts of human beings.¹⁷⁴ Asma Hussain Khan, a Pakistani scholar of interfaith, politics and psychology, instead, understands human beings' freedom through the concept of responsibility, and so she does not see any contradiction between freedom and divine preordainment. This responsibility consists of accepting the trust of God given to them in the phenomenal world that provides man and woman to choose between various alternatives:

The destiny set by God for [humans] is flexible enough to provide them with freedom, creativity and scheme by which man [and woman] choose [their] course. [They], through [their] knowledge and endless capabilities provided by God, can mold [their] persona and [their] ambience. It is up to man [and woman] how [they want] to use these energies because destiny provides man [and woman] with enormous opportunities to mold [them] into a better person and tread the path to excellence. But, human destiny however has the limitations itself imposed by God. [They owe their] existence to God. This is because God is the ultimate power behind every bit of move. The freedom and creative energies are bestowed by God to

¹⁷³ Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, 116.

¹⁷⁴ See Ali Yıldız Musahan, "Müslüman düşüncesinde musibet-rahmet ilişkisi," *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 20/66 (2016): 137.

man [and woman] otherwise [they] could do nothing. Man [and woman are] destined to express [their] possibilities granted by God.¹⁷⁵

God who has absolute freedom, limits humankind's freedom. Therefore, humankind is not free as God is. However, humankind is free to choose among different alternatives, and each is responsible for his or her deeds:

[S]ay, 'It is the truth from your Lord! So whosoever will, let him [or her] believe, and whosoever will, let him [or her] disbelieve' (18:29).

Truly We have sent down unto thee the Book for [hu]mankind in truth. Whosoever is rightly guided, it is for the sake of his [or her] own soul. And whosoever goes astray only goes astray to the detriment thereof. And thou art not a guardian over them (39:41).

4. Reflections on Theodicy Perspectives in Turkish Society

After exploring disability in the primary sources of Islam, and investigating theological reflections and theoretical attempts aimed to explain the omnipresent dilemma, "how does one understand or justify the presence of evil and painful things in the light of the fact that God the Compassionate, the Merciful, is the Supreme Power and that He has control over this universe?" I would like to explore the reverberations of all this in contemporary Turkish society. In order to do so I will attend to the Diyanet's and Fethullah Gülen's teachings on disability. These will be followed by a further contribution made by Mustafa Naci Kula, a professor of psychology of religions at Eskişehir Osmangazi University, who analyzed the relationship between attitudes

¹⁷⁵ Khan, "The Problem of Evil: Islamic Theodicy."

toward PWD and religious attitudes. Kula's research has provided considerable insight on the perception of disability in Turkish society.

a. The Diyanet and Disability

The Diyanet, as is required and established by the Turkish constitution, by staying within the boundaries of the legal task it undertakes, assumes the responsibility of meeting the religious demands and needs of today's people and commits to ensure social peace and integration. In this sense, domestic problems affecting the spiritual life of society in a negative way, and other issues that require common sensitivity and religious knowledge and resolution, such as violence, honor killings, human rights violations, indifference toward the environment, bad and harmful habits, as well as cooperation with the relevant institutions and organizations that carry out studies aimed at resolving these problems, enter under the responsibility of the Diyanet.¹⁷⁶ One of these issues is admittedly disability.

The Diyanet explained in a *fatwa* that misfortunes (*belâ*) and disasters (*musibet*) should be evaluated in three groups: (1) those in which human will is not involved (such as earthquakes, being born with disabilities), (2) those in which human will is partially involved (such as traffic accidents in which human beings are partly at fault), (3) those caused by human will (such as car accidents caused by drunk driving or diseases acquired because of carelessness and imprudence). In terms of divine wisdom these are all considered divinely preordained. According to the *fatwa*, the first two are atonement for sins and an opportunity to get to a higher rank before God. Since the last one is caused by human error, even though it is divinely preordained in terms of divine wisdom, humans are still responsible for it. What is expected by believers is to take refuge in

¹⁷⁶ İsmail Karagöz, *Toplumsal emanet: Engelliler* (Ankara: DİB, 2008), 9.

God in order to be immune from misfortunes and disasters. However, when these occur, to be patient and to believe in divine preordainment. It is necessary not to forget that God is merciful and graceful. Therefore, God would provide great rewards to those who are exposed to suffering yet are still patient. In addition, since God examines humankind God also may give them some tribulations and afflictions. In these situations, humankind should behave as the servants (*kul*) of God which they are.¹⁷⁷

Mehmet Görmez, the current President of the Diyanet, rejects vehemently the question often posed to parents of a disabled child: “What kind of sin did you commit in order to receive a disabled child?” This perception belongs to the period which precedes Islam and it is absolutely not accepted by Islam. According to Görmez to consider disability as a punishment rather than a test is against the teaching of Islam, and consequently, the Diyanet has the duty of explaining this to society. The Diyanet has to announce to PWD that every effort of patience demonstrated by them before all kind of disabilities, is part of prophet Eyyûb’s patience, and therefore will take them to the Heaven.¹⁷⁸

In a pastoral letter that Görmez wrote to believers with disabilities in 2015, underlining that PWD are sometimes visible and sometimes hidden, he pointed out that every human being has an inherent value and one earns this value from birth by being created as a human being. One has the right to overcome his or her needs with respect to one’s own dignity. Although one needs

¹⁷⁷ Answer given through the “Platform of Answers to Religious Questions” on the Diyanet’s website <http://www.diyamet.gov.tr/en/home> to the following question: Are tribulations and evils destiny? (*Belâlar ve musibetler kader midir?*)

¹⁷⁸ “Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Görmez’den engelli vatandaşlara iftar yemeği,” August 24, 2011, www.diyamet.gov.tr.

support, this does not prevent him or her to embrace life. God taught through Muhammad how to welcome PWD, respecting their dignity.¹⁷⁹

The Diyanet in 2014 launched a new service for people with hearing impairments, which consists of sermons with sign language. The Diyanet in order to provide unity in religious education prepared also the *Dictionary of Religious Concepts with the Turkish Sign Language* which contains a visual description of about 800 religious concepts with sign language, and it is accessible on the web.¹⁸⁰ The Diyanet also helps every year a large group of Turkish believers with disabilities accompanied by volunteers to go to the Hajj to absolve their religious duties and to visit both Mecca and Medina.¹⁸¹

b. “Garip”: PWD according to Fethullah Gülen

In the first chapter I introduced broadly Fethullah Gülen’s Hizmet Movement and his Islamic teaching. In this section I present his perspective on personal disability that he considers “*garip*,” meaning “piteous, pitiful.” In Gülen’s understanding, Islam promotes equality as commanded by God who wants mutual respect among all fellow human beings. By embracing every individual and every group with the same equality and warmth, Islam responds to the expectations and the needs of everyone in the same way. Another major tenet of Islamic teaching, according to Gülen, is that everyone deserves love, care, and respect, no matter if he or she is disabled or not. What really matters, instead, is one’s heart and conduct. Therefore, Gülen encourages his followers to accept all human beings regardless of their disability and to include them in society as well as to support them by addressing their needs. It is the duty and responsibility of everyone to serve the

¹⁷⁹ “Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Görmez’den engellilere mektup,” May 9, 2015, www.diyanet.gov.tr.

¹⁸⁰ See <http://engelsiz.diyanet.gov.tr>.

¹⁸¹ “Diyanet’ten engellilere yönelik umre programı,” April 30, 2015, www.diyanet.gov.tr.

needs of others, and Divine mercy and blessings will be showered on us. This mercy-based teaching relies on the Quran's demands and Muhammad's teaching expressed in a Hadith reported by Abu Davud: "God the Merciful shows mercy to merciful people. Show mercy to those on earth so that God shows mercy on you."¹⁸²

Regarding PWD Gülen distinguishes different responsibilities, some of which are related to religious duties, some to pedagogy, and some to psychology. Looking at the religious side of things, Gülen teaches that it does not matter if a person's eyes do not see or if a person's ear does not hear or if a person has pronunciation mistakes while speaking and cannot express himself or herself well. We have to respect and admire, first of all, the will of God on those people; God wanted and created them in that way. These people are servants of God as well, and although they have some disabilities they have always some other qualities, and we must respect the discretion of Allah in that regard.¹⁸³

For Gülen it is important to recognize that PWD have been created in the most beautiful stature (cf. Quran 95:4). Then in them there is such a thing as internal structure which, when it develops, has the ability, the equipment, to leave the angels behind. Therefore, for instance, just because of some deformations on their face, if we ignore the whole of what God Almighty hid in them like a treasure, this would be a big mistake. Such behavior may break their heart, may shake their spiritual life, and finally may cause their self-exclusion from society. All of this is essentially disadvantageous to religion, and it can be resolved only with the moral system revealed by the Islamic religion.

¹⁸² Hurisa Güvercin, "People with Disabilities from an Islamic Perspective," *The Fountain* 63 (2008) <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/People-with-Disabilities-from-an-Islamic-Perspective>.

¹⁸³ Fethullah Gülen, "Engelliler ve asıl engeller," (AUDIO in Turkish), Hizmet Movement Website, January 4, 2010, <http://www.herkul.org/bamтели/engelliler-ve-asil-engeller/>.

In order to ground this moral system within society which consequently will be able to accept disabled members, Gülen proposes schools for their rehabilitation, and appropriate institutions in order to create jobs for them. Only in these ways may they be satisfied by their own moods. Another urgent task according to Gülen should be education and sensitization of other people. Gülen confesses auto-critically that Muslims do not yet have this kind of grounded Islamic and Quranic moral system, which may take away from stress, and panic attacks that PWD really face; there are no people who take this issue deeply.

The reason Gülen calls them “*garip*” is that because of their disabilities they are condemned, defied, oppressed; they are not encouraged, rehabilitated, and society does not support them in this regard. In other words,

the place where they live is broken, the street is broken, the school is incapable, poor, and of course they cannot find in Mosques what they want. So they are piteous. If they are aware of their being piteous, if they go to Allah, they will gain the Hereafter by Allah’s favor. But this is also very difficult. It is quite difficult to get rid of such kinds of psychoses and to thank Allah Almighty even in the worst situations and to say, “Allah is enough; the rest is whim.”¹⁸⁴

Gülen notes the attitude of Muhammad toward socially marginalized people in general and PWD by underlining that Muhammad was always interested in the struggles of his people. He reserved a positive attitude for the outcast, sensitizing them through his speeches, behavior, and compliments. Gülen recalls that, in the era that precedes Islam, baby girls were buried alive in sand, women were not respected, and people of that era were also eliminating those with disabilities for they were not considered useful. He also remarks that Muhammad, by announcing

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

the moral system of Islam, educated and transformed them into civilized people capable of governing the entire world. He taught them not to observe the defects of people but to focus on their good characteristics and their relationship with God, respecting and encouraging “the blind, the lame, those who are incapable of weak, paralyzed and with some other disabilities,”¹⁸⁵ he underlined their position in society and by doing so he encouraged others to accept them.¹⁸⁶

Gülen argues that it is very important to bear some struggles in order to be an example to others: “If we consider the issue from a religious perspective, if God took the feet of a believer, and let him or her to suffer in this world, in the Hereafter God is going to give him or her diverse benefits and superior feet. Muhammad, indeed, saw Amr b. Cemûh in a vision to be martyred, and then his curved legs to be straightened out in paradise.”¹⁸⁷ Therefore, according to Gülen, the sadness that PWD experience interiorly when they cannot do things their peers do, can be considered worship. If believers are patient when misfortunes happen, those misfortunes will elevate them. God who took those abilities from them, will also reward them three times over. PWD are also considered an example given for others for they can appreciate and recognize hands, tongue, eyes, and ears as benedictions.¹⁸⁸

Finally, Gülen considers misfortunes a way to grow up spiritually. It follows that believers should recognize their faults in the case of misfortunes that happen. If they do so, first of all they would repent, then they would avoid judging their fate, and finally they would be granted extra graces from God since God gives troubles for their sins to be atonement: “If you consider your own faults as causes in all troubles, you would not criticize your destiny nor search for a criminal other than yourself. A person who considers his or her soul as guilty does not look for another

¹⁸⁵ In Gülen’s words: “körler, sakatlar, aliller, topallar, kötürümler.”

¹⁸⁶ Gülen, “Engelliler ve asıl engeller.”

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

guilty, and a person looking for a guilty person other than himself or herself can never catch the really guilty.”¹⁸⁹

c. Mustafa Naci Kula and Attitudes toward PWD

A study, made by Mustafa Naci Kula, which analyzed the relationship between attitudes toward PWD from birth or from other factors such as illness, accidents, or natural disasters, and religious attitudes which provide a broad reference framework in the life of individuals, has given considerable insight on the perception of disability within Turkish society. Kula, who has dedicated his entire academic career mostly to the attitudes of PWD, by surveying high school and college students, and by analyzing the findings of his study in respect to some variables such as age, gender, and socio-economic status, has found that there is a positive relationship between religious attitudes and attitudes toward PWD.¹⁹⁰

According to his research, seventy-seven percent of the orthopedically and visually impaired individuals described their disability as a primarily painful and distressing event. In addition to them, some twenty-three percent of the disabled also reported that they were experiencing this distressing event because either they were imprudent or they were negligent. Seventy-three percent of those who considered disability as a painful and distressing event, defined their situation as a punishment of God.

In light of these findings, Kula argues that if an event arouses in the individual pain, sadness, and suffering, it also leaves deep traces in the soul. All feelings and thoughts of the individual in question become confusing, and it results in difficulty to accept one's status of disability, which

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Kula, *Bedensel engellilik ve başa çıkma*, 241-247; see also Mustafa Naci Kula, “Bedensel engellilere yönelik tutumlar ile dini tutumlar arasındaki ilişki üzerine bir araştırma,” *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi* 19/3 (2006): 511.

finally results in distress and a complex mood. This mood at the same time pushes the individual to make an assessment between what he or she lived before and what they are living now. The individual may question him or herself, and may easily reach a conclusion that a mistake made in the past may be the cause of disability. Kula interprets it that, as a result of being connected to an authority, in this case God, an individual may have an expectation of punishment or reward for his or her deeds, especially when there is a distressing event. Often sufferers continue to ask the questions, “Why me?” or “What did I do to deserve this?” At the same time, they come up with answers to all these kinds of questions ranging from violating moral virtue to dealing with imperfections in their worship: “God pays me for what I did,” so that the individual provoked by the influence of a strong sentiment of guilt may be convinced he or she is being punished.

Kula finds that PWD in Turkish society try to overcome their struggles through religious attitudes, which are primarily good behavior, prayer, and spiritual help. As a religious attitude, good behavior occupies the first place. Disabled people, instead of worrying about attitudes and considerations of others toward disabled people, tend to try to live according to religious insights by conducting a good level moral life. When they encounter struggles both from their disability status and in their effort to live a better moral life, they augment their prayers and petitions by taking refuge in God. Finally, they look forward to receiving help from other believers with whom they share the same religious beliefs.¹⁹¹

Kula argues that the fact that younger disabled people (with respect to adult ones) engage more with religion, is connected to the characteristics of youth. Young people build up their identity in that period of time and all bio-psychologic developments of that period prepare them for adulthood. They are more attentive to their bodies. In his research, indeed, Kula finds that

¹⁹¹ See Kula, *Bedensel engellilik ve başa çıkma*, 241-242.

while sixty-four percent of young people with sight disabilities feel comfortable with their current physical appearance, among those who are orthopedically disabled about thirty-three percent are undecided whether they are comfortable or not about their physical appearance.¹⁹² Therefore, when there is a disability in question they give great importance to the considerations of their peers about their bodies. Stress and dealing with difficulties provoked by the judgments of others push them toward religion. Those disabled youth who are engaged more with religion in their youth, have deeper religious life in their adulthood.¹⁹³

Another important finding concerns those young people without any disability. Among them, those who have a grounded religious formation and faith see their disabled peers as nothing more or less than themselves. This attitude tends to diminish when young people with less religious education and conviction are in question. Even though they have positive thoughts toward their disabled peers, they also have difficulty making sense of this situation. Kula believes that while the great importance reserved by Islam for human beings (especially Islam's principles and values regarding disabled people) helps to develop a more positive attitude in the first group, the second group are more affected by judgments and considerations of society toward PWD.¹⁹⁴

Kula concludes that, as disabled people want to understand their situation and strive to handle the problems they encounter, religion may be a source in helping PWD to evaluate and adjust to their situation and to solve the resulting problems. The main reason for this is that religion provides the disabled person some information to understand themselves and their environment, and consequently to form a helpful life perspective. The lack of religious

¹⁹² Mustafa Naci Kula, "Bedeni özürlü gençlerin din eğitiminde dikkat edilmesi gereken psikolojik hususlar" (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2000), 187; see also Mustafa Naci Kula, "Engelli birey ve ailesinin psiko-sosyal sorunları ve manevi destek," in *Din, felsefe ve bilim ışığında engelli olmak ve sorunları sempozyumu bildirileri*, ed., Mehmet Mazak (İstanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2012), 79.

¹⁹³ Kula, *Bedensel engellilik ve başa çıkma*, 243.

¹⁹⁴ Kula, "Bedensel engellilere yönelik tutumlar," 520.

knowledge, indeed, has a crucial role in evaluating the life and disability with a negative attitude. Whereas, a true knowledge of the disability and a grounded relationship with the creator enable one to eliminate those negative emotions toward God, they may certainly save PWD from the depressed situation they are in. If religious education is given starting from a young age, it will prevent this negative point of view from beginning.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, PWD may benefit from a religious communiqué (*tebliğ*) and spiritual guidance (*irşad*) based on the knowledge that God is merciful and loveable, and the differences which exist among creatures are the fruits of God's providence rather than the results of God's punishment.¹⁹⁶

In this chapter I reflected on disability from a Muslim perspective, and the focus has been the context of Turkey. After presenting the origin of the Turkish language and its interactions with Arabic, the official language of Islam, I went through the primary sources of Islam, namely, the Quran, the Sünnet and Islamic Law, whence I extracted notions and dispositions regarding disability and PWD. The verb "to extract" is quite proper because in any of these sources the disability and its derivatives are mentioned directly. Then I moved the lens to disability from a Theodicy perspective concerned more with the dilemma between human suffering and the existence of disabilities, and God's wisdom and justice. The first part of this investigation examined the historical development of theological understanding of the problem of evil. In the second part I offered some echoes of this theological journey in socio-religious life within current Turkish society. The findings of this chapter along with the following focused on the

¹⁹⁵ Ayşegül Gün, "İşitme engelliler ortaokulunda okuyan öğrencilerin din kültürü ve ahlak bilgisi dersine yönelik tutum ve değerlendirmeleri: Amasya ve Samsun örneği," *Hitit İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 14/28 (2015/2): 68.

¹⁹⁶ Mustafa Naci Kula, "Engellilere verilecek tebliğ ve irşad hizmeti," *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 4 (2004): 32-33.

CC's perspective on disability in the third chapter, placed in comparison, will be discussed and commented on broadly in the fourth and last chapter.

IV. THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON DISABILITY

The experience of disability challenges the Christian community. The love of God for all creatures, and preference for the little ones, the poor, the sick, revealed in the Scriptures, accentuated both in the teaching and in the work of the Church goes beyond any legalistic approach of the reception of the sacraments. According to Christian revelation, God loves us with a love that is always above all human settings and institutions. The signs that God wanted us to express love, which we do through laws and rules must be made according to the Gospel. Consequently, the Church has no reason to exist except to make present in the world the person of Jesus, his love for humanity, especially for the little ones, the poor, the sick, and the excluded. The whole Gospel is a joyful message that God did not want to remain in the sky full of grandeur and power, but became human and thus came close to every human being to share with us the fragility, the precariousness of our situation, solidarity in pain and joy.

And here we really have to believe that the soul of PWD is the mysterious place of encounter with God, with God's love, with the peace that brings God, knowing that God loves them. Throughout its history the Church has always worked in the world to turn its attention, its loving care and solidarity toward people in need, those with disabilities, the marginalized, the handicapped. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Vincent de Paul, Joseph Cottolengo, St. Camillus de Lellis, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta are great examples. But the pastoral care of persons with disabilities should not be delegated only to a few. The community as a whole should give a voice to those who do not have voice, listen to those who cannot hear, raise the fallen, support the

weak. One's attention is directed towards those who are living in situations of handicap, so that they be considered full members of the Church, that is, not as partial persons within the Christian community, but as witnesses of faith who, themselves, proclaim the Gospel message. This is an invitation to let the sun shine on PWD, to be close to them and to create a climate in which everyone without exception can feel at home: in church, in community festivals, in the preparation and celebration of the sacraments, especially of Christian initiation.¹

On the other hand, PWD, their family members, and others who live their experience constantly, pose questions about their situations as much as their Muslim brothers and sisters do. How are we to reconcile the love of God, the contact of Jesus with humanity in his incarnation, which continues now through his Church, while there is huge suffering because of disability? Around this question has developed much theological reflection. Why does the Church welcome PWD? What does the Church say about them and what does the Church do for them? Which Gospel message pushes the reception and the appreciation of their dignity and their presence in the community? Understanding the principle and foundation of the Catholic perspective toward PWD is important not merely to fulfill a moral obligation because an intention of this kind would not be enough by itself. Rather a dialogue with other faiths is important and necessary as envisaged through this dissertation.

In this chapter, therefore, after giving some general information on the history and structure of the CC, as done above for Islam, I investigate the Scriptures related to PWD. This part is introduced by a subsection dedicated to "Humankind in the Bible" which focuses on man's and woman's being created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gn 12:6-27). Then, the investigation proceeds to the Code of Canon Law and other sources of CC teaching such as the CSD, CCC,

¹ See Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale, *L'iniziazione cristiana alle persone disabili: orientamenti e proposte* (Bologna: EDB, 2004).

followed by some considerations about the CC's activities in Turkey in relation to PWD. In the second part, I concentrate on some theodicy and anti-theodicy approaches, and I conclude it all by presenting a contemporary figure, Nancy Mairs, who after being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) through her life and the way of dealing, incarnated very deeply all the facets of disability-related issues and questions.

A) The Catholic Church

The CC is a community of believers in the Christian faith that recognizes the primacy and authority of the bishop of Rome as the vicar of Christ and successor of Peter, the pope, the supreme religious authority. From the time of the Edict of Constantine (313), which decreed the legitimacy of Christian worship in the Roman Empire, the Church has been called catholic, that is “universal,” in reference to the universal character of the community of the faithful. The word “catholic” in early Christianity meant the common bond of the various local churches, the one faith in Christ, and fidelity to a doctrine shared by all. But after the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation at the Council of Trent the term came gradually to indicate the one true Church, whose claim to universality is not yet recognized by the Orthodox and Protestant Churches.

Theologically, the main features of the CC are indefectibility (that is, its perdurance until the return of Christ) and its powers that represent the continuation of the work started by Christ on earth. These characteristics are expressed in the magisterium of the Church entrusted to the protection of the true faith: (1) that it has the right and duty to teach all nations, (2) that it is holy with its sacramental power, (3) that grace is conferred through the sacraments, and (4) the jurisdiction that includes the legislative, executive, and judicial.

The CC has a well-defined doctrinal and liturgical apparatus, the result of a long process, and a strongly hierarchical structure. The CC, in fact, is organized at several levels, with the distinction between clergy and laity; the hierarchical order of the clergy is composed of bishops, priests and deacons, and at the summit, the pope, whose infallibility was declared at Vatican I (1870), and reaffirmed by Vatican II (1962-65). The first community of Roman Christians was connected to the other Christian communities spread throughout the Roman Empire, against other Christian communities which had not yet claimed judicial and dogmatic primacy: in the early ecumenical councils, held in the East, they appear as protagonists especially the bishops of the Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, called patriarchs.

In the 11th century, the Eastern Churches separated from Rome with the schism of the East (1054), refusing to recognize the pope's universal role which he claimed openly. In the confessional sense, however, the start of Catholicism can be connected to Luther who had a desire to purify the Church by a reform that concerned both the customs of the clergy and the conscience of the individual. Even the Church of England broke away from Rome (1533). From this stage, the term "catholic" designated the Church of Rome as distinct from other Christian Churches that did not recognize the pope's authority. The Church reacted to these events with the Counter-Reformation, whose essential moment was the Council of Trent (1545-63): on the one hand it involved a strong emphasis on respect for orthodoxy (theological and spiritual) and the authority of the Church hierarchy (organizational), and on the other hand formed a chance for reflection and renewal of spirituality and Christian practice. The pontificate of John XXIII inaugurated a new relationship between the Church and the contemporary world, focusing more on dialogue; a fundamental moment of this new approach was Vatican II (1962-65) which recognized the Church as the People of God, and revalued the episcopal collegiality of the

bishops in the government of the Church, but always in a position subordinate to the authority of the pope.

The Council of Trent identified the sources of God's revelation to humans in both Scripture and Tradition, that is, the whole of the oral traditions of faith and morals derived from Christ and transmitted continuously in the CC. It affirmed the transmission of original sin to the entire human nature and its complete remission by baptism. The Council affirmed that faith, a free gift of God, is the starting point of justification. Justification is a process that includes a series of successive moments, always guided by the free grace of God, and all this implies that a voluntary response from the faithful proceeds by a life according to God's call, active in charity and renewed by the sacraments.

The sacraments appointed by Christ, seven in number (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, confession, extreme unction, orders, and marriage) are efficacious signs of grace, which is conferred by the very fact of being administered. In particular, penance restores the justification lost by sin, by the verbal confession of sins to a priest and the subsequent acquittal. As for the Eucharist, the Council established the doctrine of transubstantiation, whereby the bread and wine in the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ. Marriage, considered a divine institution like the other sacraments, is considered unbreakable and so divorce is unacceptable, unlike what happens in other Christian confessions. The devotion to Mary, Mother of God, is another specificity of Catholicism, reinforced by two specific dogmas promulgated in the modern age: The Immaculate Conception (1854), that is, the doctrine that Mary is the only human creature to have been conceived without original sin, and the assumption of Mary into heaven, body and soul (1950).

The rules governing Church practice have been organized in a documentary tradition of so-called Canon Law which refers both to the body of ecclesiastical and divine law that governs the Church, and to the discipline of its interpretation that developed over the centuries. Furthermore, there are six precepts of the Church drawn from the Roman Catechism of the Council of Trent, traditionally enjoined upon all Catholics: (1) to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; (2) to observe the laws of fast and abstinence; (3) to receive the sacrament of penance once a year (4) to receive Holy Communion annually at least once during Easter time; (5) to contribute to the support of the pastor; and (6) to observe the marriage laws of the Church.

Along with this there is also the CCC promulgated by John Paul II in his Apostolic Constitution *Fidei depositum* (1992), whose primary purpose is to provide an aid for bishops and bishops' conferences in the preparation of catechetical materials better adapted to their individual dioceses. Indeed, the Catechism is not explicitly a papal document, nor a collegial document of all the bishops of the Church in the sense of a conciliar document. In other words, it is a document of the magisterium *in quanto* promulgated by the Holy See. However, as pointed out by James T. Bretzke, a moral theologian at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, "it certainly would be an error to accord the Catechism as a whole an authority higher than any other document of the magisterium such as conciliar decrees or papal encyclicals."²

² See James T. Bretzke, S.J., *Handbook of Roman Catholic Moral Terms*, s.v. "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 30-31; see also s.v. "Canon Law" and "Precept and precepts of the Church" in the same source.

B) Disability in the Bible

According to Nancy Eiesland, who was a professor at the Candler School of Theology of Emory University and born with a congenital bone defect, three theological themes, sin and disability conflation, virtuous suffering, and segregationist charity, illustrate the theological obstacles encountered by PWD who seek inclusion and justice within the Christian community. While the first one, that is, combining disability with sin, consists in a belief that disability indicates punishment for wrongdoing and damages the divine image in humankind, the second theme considers disability as virtuous suffering in the sense that disability is identified as a condition that must be endured in order to purify the righteous, a teaching that encourages people to acquiesce to social barriers as a sign of obedience to God. Finally, the third theme, namely segregationist charity, perceives “marginalized persons, including people with disabilities” as cases of charity.³

The Bible, which is the principal inspiration of Catholic teaching, as the Quran is for Islam, illuminates further all these themes. Relying on the research previously done on the Quran, and now in the Bible, neither in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament is there any single

³ See Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 70-75. Although Eiesland was not a Catholic, my first reference to her opera can seem non-relevant for my focus on disability from a Catholic perspective, I consider complementary her contributions. In this magisterial book, Eiesland points out that the traditional Christian theology tends to isolate the disabled, rather than embrace them: “The persistent thread within the Christian tradition has been that disability denotes an unusual relationship with God and that the person with disabilities is either divinely blessed or damned” (70-71). Contrary to this position, as both these beliefs do not reflect reality, in other places Eiesland argued that, “The primary problem for the church is not how to accommodate disabled persons. The problem is a disabling theology that functionally denies inclusion and justice for many of God’s children. Much of church theology and practice -- including the Bible itself -- has often been dangerous for persons with disabilities.” She adds that “the prejudice, hostility, and suspicion toward people with disabilities cannot be dismissed simply as relics of an unenlightened past. Christians today continue to interpret Scripture and spin theologies that reinforce negative stereotypes, support social and environmental segregation, and mask the lived realities of people with disabilities.” Nancy Eiesland, “Encountering the Disabled God,” *The Other Side* (2002): 10.

general term that would include all PWD as a group. Nevertheless, research on biblical vocabulary utilizing terms such as blind, deaf, lame, mute, weak gives different results. In the Bible, indeed, disability is viewed as a disease and the most common diseases mentioned in the Bible are blindness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy, and paralysis. Before analyzing some of the narratives in the Bible related to PWD, as I did with Islam, I would like to focus on humankind in the Bible.

The first preparatory document for the “Jubilee Day of the Community with Persons with Disabilities” desired by Pope John Paul II, on which will be further considerations below, presents humankind, male and female, as the greatest of God’s creatures, crowned by God with love:

As living beings created in the image and likeness of God we are united with Him and, like God, humanity is surrounded by mystery. Man [and woman are] an extraordinarily rich reality: [their] value surpasses that of any other created reality because the fact that [they are] unique and unrepeatable, guarantees [their] original dignity (Committee, One).⁴

Alongside such greatness, glory, and honor, however, humans also experience pain, sickness, and limitation. One of these limitations, with all its questions, is mental or physical disability or a combination of both. The efforts made to reconcile these two characteristics, that is, man’s and woman’s being created in God’s image and likeness on one hand, and his or her limitations on the other, have been a constant in the development of CC’s perspective toward PWD. According to Pope John Paul II, for instance, one of the key points of Catholic teaching has been that “the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love in Jesus Christ reveals man to man, and gives

⁴ These five Committee documents are available at www.vatican.va.

the ultimate answer to the question, ‘What is man?’”⁵ Pia Matthews argues that the answer to this question encompasses not only human identity but also the vocation of every human being: “It has as its foundation one of the central tenets in the Christian tradition: that human beings are made in the image of God and that through the Incarnation the solidarity of Christ with humanity sharpens.”⁶ In this sense, for instance, the following considerations, made by Mary Jo Iozzio, a professor at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry with a special interest in disability studies, are significant as they render the centrality of being created in God’s image and likeness for Catholic teaching on disability as well as present its reverberations in life:

promising to love and be loved, the Church, in its domestic and liturgical manifestations, vows to accept the gift of a child as the *imago Dei* comes into the world again and again. To this end, the Catholic Church is committed to the protection of the right to life of every child conceived and born until natural death. This commitment extends in deliberate and overt ways to those whose presence in the world signals a disability or the threat of disability, a signal that some would prefer to be unrealized (and therefore prevented by abortion, infanticide, neglect, abuse, or euthanasia).⁷

As one can see, the *imago Dei* “has proved to be a rich source of reflection in the theological tradition,” and the passage of Genesis 1:26-31 which narrates the creation of the first man and woman in the image and likeness of God “as constituting the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology.”⁸ Therefore, before analyzing Scripture from a disability perspective, it is

⁵ Karol Wojtyla, *Sources of Renewal* (London: Fount, 1975), 75, cited by Pia Matthews, *Pope John Paul II and the Apparently ‘Non-acting’ Person* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2013), 61.

⁶ Pia Matthews, *Pope John Paul II and the Apparently ‘Non-acting’ Person* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2013), 61.

⁷ Mary Jo Iozzio, “Catholicism and Disability” in *Disability and World Religions: An Introduction*, eds. Darla Y. Schumm et al. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 125.

⁸ Matthews, *Pope John Paul II and the Apparently ‘Non-acting’ Person*, 61.

necessary to offer some considerations on humankind in the Bible from an *imago Dei* perspective.

1. Humankind in the Bible: “*Imago Dei*”

The main source of *imago Dei* is in Genesis 1:26-27, “Let us make man [and woman] in our image, after our likeness.” These verses reveal man and woman as a bundle of relations, and the first of these relations is between him or her, and God,⁹ and is to be considered along with Genesis 5:1-3 and 9:6:

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God, he created them male and female.... Adam was one hundred and thirty years old, and he begot a son in his likeness, after his image, and he named him Seth (5:1-3).

If anyone sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; For in the image of God has man been made (9:6).

In the first verse, “let us” signifies that what is in question is a plural deliberation of God with Godself or perhaps in the supposed presence of the heavenly court. While the word “man” is a common noun, almost with the sense of humankind, the word “image” is a translation of the Hebrew word *selem*, which designates a representation in the form of a statue, therefore “image” here is to be taken in the concrete sense of the word. On the other hand, the word “likeness,” corresponding to *demut*, is a more abstract word than *selem*. The word “Adam,” which corresponds also to humans, is created in the likeness of Elohim, and in his turn generates a son in his own image and likeness. It follows that the image is transmitted from the beginning, and is

⁹ See Albert Gelin, S.S., *The Concept of Man in the Bible* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 26.

a permanent endowment despite all the vicissitudes of humans such as sin. After the flood, indeed, sin remains present. In 9:6 especially the sin of murder is highlighted as here the murder is stigmatized and punished because of this “image” of God that is intrinsic to every man and woman.¹⁰

What would be the outcome of this biblical analysis? How can man and woman represent God? Albert Gelin, who was a French Sulpician priest, and a renowned exegete, puts in opposition two different perspectives in order to understand this. First, in the thinking of the German Protestant theologian Koehler, humans are the “image of God,” because they represent God by God’s stature, God’s upright posture. This vertical posture differentiates man and woman from animals. This is why in the Bible God makes every kind of animal appear before Adam, so that Adam can search among them for a companion who will be his exact “*vis-à-vis*” (Gn 2:18 ff). Second, Edmond Jacob argues that man and woman receive from God a real function, a delegation to dominate the beasts. This is what is expressed in Gn 1:26: “Let them have domination over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”¹¹ Koehler’s physical analogy expressed in terms of a sublime stature given to human beings and Jacob’s idea of royalty received by man and woman should not be seen as opposed but rather complimentary as all together they render properly the idea of human value and dignity.

Some other biblical sources where man’s and woman’s being created in God’s image and likeness is expressed eloquently are Psalm 8 and the book of Sirach:

¹⁰ Ibid., 27-29.

¹¹ Ibid., 29-31.

What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor (Ps 8:5-6).

The Lord from the earth created man [and woman], and in his own image he made [them ...] He endows [them] with a strength of his own, and with power over all things else on earth (Sir 17:1-3).

These verses show that our resemblance with God resides also in this power over the lower creatures. The animals are, of course, concrete ones. But this term in the Bible also symbolizes the chaotic powers, for instance, the monstrous beasts in Psalm 74, as they are symbols of evil, of sin. As Yahweh has won these forces, put some order in this chaos, human beings also dominate the beasts but they are also winners over evil by their constitution as the imitators of God reacting against evil. However, the “image” is not identical to its origin; therefore, to remain an “image” of God, humans must struggle in order to maintain relationship with God.¹²

That being said, two important consequences of being made in the image of God can be identified. The first consequence is that being God’s image corresponds to participation in the incorruptibility of God. This view is based on the book of Wisdom, which comes from a Greek background, so this book emphasizes the soul: “For God formed man [and woman] to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made [them]. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in possession experience it” (Wis 2:23-24). For the author of Wisdom, we are images of God above all because of our soul which is spiritual and immortal. This is why it participates in the incorruptibility of God. While the second consequence is the

¹² Ibid., 32-33.

perspective that being the image of God is equivalent to participation in Christ, as the latter is *imago Dei par excellence* (See Col 1:15, 2 Cor 4:4).¹³

Jesus Christ and the Imago Dei

At this point, I would like to dedicate a few lines to this perspective of Jesus Christ as *imago Dei* and human beings' participation in him. This would be helpful to better understand his healing encounters with PWD of his time. Christ is the new Adam, the first in a new series of men and women. The first Adam was created in "God's image and likeness." We should not forget that that image does not imply equality with the creator, but a relationship with God. Adam shattered that image and so was cast forth from Paradise. On the other hand, Jesus Christ, the second Adam, did the contrary and abased himself which resulted in his being exalted.¹⁴ "[Christ Jesus] though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:6-11).

As a result of being the new Adam, the perfect image of the transcendent God, Christ has also the mission to transform Christians into images of the same God by virtue of their baptisms as revealed by Paul's letter to the Colossians: "Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator" (3:10). The end of this verse is an allusion to Genesis 1:26 from where we started our excursus. It is through baptism that Christians "have clothed [themselves] with Christ" (cf. Gal 3:27). In effect in the Christian Catholic understanding, starting from Christ, we can speak of a dynamics of resurrection that crosses and transforms our

¹³ Ibid., 37-38.

¹⁴ Ibid.

present world. Thus, for the resurrection of men and women, the Holy Spirit does not come to restore earthly bodies of human beings in their earthly condition, but will bring them into a new mode of existence, a spiritual condition. This is why all human beings, who have clothed themselves with Christ, as *imago Dei*, and have lived in love given and in love received, as well as in suffering and darkness, all this passes through their lives, body, history, and death, all this is promised to be transfigured with Christ.¹⁵

As happens in many other issues related to the human body, diseases, and disabilities, the teaching of the CC finds its principle and foundation in the suffering and death of Christ on the cross followed by his glorious resurrection. This principle and foundation, that is, the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, is offered as a help to be patient for people who deal with different kinds of misfortunes, diseases, and disabilities, as well as such as hope for the Hereafter. Jesus Christ “took away [their] infirmities and bore [their] diseases as when it was evening, they were bringing him many who were possessed by demons, and he drove out the spirits by a word and cured all the sick” (Mt 8:16-17; Is 53:4). The prophet speaks, indeed, of the Servant of the Lord who suffers vicariously for the sins, that is, the infirmities of others, and Matthew takes the infirmities as physical afflictions. 1 Peter, furthermore, presents Christ’s suffering as a healing source for those who are suffering: “He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (2:24).

It follows that, from the Catholic standpoint, there are two principal points to observe in order to understand how Christ’s suffering is related to human suffering. The first is that Christ’s

¹⁵ Cf. Augustin Dupré La Tour, S.J., “Conception de l’Homme (âme et corps) en christianisme,” in *Questions de bioéthique au regard de l’islam et du christianisme*, eds. Augustin Dupré La Tour, S.J. et al. (Beyrouth, Dar el-Machreq, 2000), 20-21.

suffering was itself redeemed. In other words, being risen from the dead in a glorified body, Christ was made whole. The second, instead, consists in Christians' call to continue his redemptive process; by continuing Christ's redemptive work Christians share also his suffering. Following this understanding, suffering is not meaningless; instead, "it is a particular way in which Christians may share in Christ's work, a way concomitant with taking on their vocation as a follower of Christ."¹⁶

2. Some Narratives from the Old and New Testaments

Making a word search in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) I found the word "blind" eighty-nine times, fifty-two times in the New Testament and thirty-seven times in Old Testament; the word "deaf" sixteen times, five in the New Testament and eleven in the Old Testament; the word "lame" thirty-one times, one in the New Testament and sixteen in Old Testament. While the word "blindness" is met six times and only in the Old Testament, and the word "lameness" only once and only in the Old Testament, I did not find the word "deafness" in either the New Testament or the Old Testament. This search can still be extended with other words used to identify PWD. Iozzio, for instance, found the words "blemished" seventeen, "defective" two, "fool(ish)" 225, and "possessed" nine times.¹⁷

In some of these passages disabilities are caused by old age as in the cases of Isaac, Jacob, and Eli:

Isaac was so old that his eyesight had failed him (Gn 27:1);

¹⁶ Scott J. Fitzpatrick et al., "Religious Perspectives on Human Suffering: Implications for Medicine and Bioethics," *Journal of Religion and Health* 55 (2016): 6.

¹⁷ Cf. Mary Jo Iozzio, "Disability in Global Contexts" (paper presented at the 23rd Annual Pyne Memorial Presentation meeting, Boston, MA, March 27, 2015): 9.

Israel's eyes were dim from age (Gn 48:10);

[Eli's] eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see (1 Sam 3:2); Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes would not focus. So he could not see (4:15).

While in many other cases disability is attributed to God, and the natural causes of disability are not mentioned. As we pointed out before, the Old Testament supports the link between sin and disability, and consequently punishment. We find, indeed, that the general view of the Old Testament writers is that God brings disability as punishment for transgressions, a curse as a consequence of disobedience. In this regard, Pauline A. Otieno, who studied biblical and theological perspectives on disability, argues that “the ancient nations regarded visual impairment as the lowest degradation that could be inflicted upon humans and, by extension, to a nation.”¹⁸ Here is an example given by the Deuteronomist:

But if you will not obey ... then all these curses shall come upon you and overwhelm you ... the LORD will strike you with madness, blindness and panic, so that even at midday you will grope in the dark as though blind, unable to find your way. You will be oppressed and robbed continually, with no one to come to your aid” (Dt 28:15, 28-29).

Actually, throughout the Old Testament, visual impairment is viewed as a symbol of ignorance, sin, and unbelief, sometimes to describe those who dwell in the darkness of prison or captivity (Is 42:7, 16-19; 43:8; 49:9; Ps 146:7-8), sometimes to indicate the lack of intellectual or moral understanding (Is 29:9-10, 18). In the same way, hearing impairment symbolizes spiritual

¹⁸ Pauline A. Otieno, “Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability: Implications on the Rights of Persons with Disability in Kenya,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29/4 (2009), n.p., <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/988/1164>.

stubbornness or deliberate refusal to hear and obey the word of God (Jer 5:21; Ez 12:2). In Is 42:18-20 Israel is portrayed as a servant with ears, but not hearing and obeying the Lord, or in Is 43:8 the prophet is pictured as calling the Israelites to hear the word of God because their sins had deafened their ears. Those who refused to hear the prophets even while judgment falls on them (Zec 7:11-14) were considered deaf like the idols they serve (Dt 4:28; Ps 115:4-8; Rv 9:20).¹⁹

In some cases, disabilities are referred to the animals. Deuteronomy 15:20-22, for instance, regarding all the firstborn males of a herd and of flocks, enumerates “lameness or blindness” as a “defect,” therefore an impediment “to sacrifice to the Lord.” This and other considerations, although made for animals to sacrifice, have without doubt affected at different levels perspectives of society toward PWD as well as some religious-juridical ordinances. For instance, Leviticus 21:16-23 where the requirements for ministry are set forth, can be read under this perspective:

The LORD said to Moses: Say to Aaron: None of your descendants, throughout their generations, who has any blemish shall come forward to offer the food of his God. Anyone who has any of the following blemishes may not come forward: he who is blind, or lame, or who has a split lip, or a limb too long, or a broken leg or arm, or who is a hunchback or dwarf or has a growth in the eye, or who is afflicted with sores, scabs, or crushed testicles. No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any such blemish may draw near to offer the oblations of the LORD; on account of his blemish he may not draw near to offer the food of his God. He may, however, eat the food of his God: of the most sacred as well as sacred offerings. Only, he may not enter through the veil nor draw near to the altar on account of his blemish; he shall not profane my sacred precincts, for it is I, the LORD, who make them holy.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Though priests with certain bodily imperfections cannot serve at the altar, their physical imperfection is considered as an impediment to the exercise of the priestly office. Also Daniel 1:3-4 enforces the link between perfection of body and “spiritual beauty” pointed out also by Eiesland. This passage narrates the order of king Nebuchadnezzar to his chief chamberlain Ashpenaz, to bring in some of the Israelites, some of the royal line and of the nobility. The king, among other characteristics required, emphasizes that these should be young males without any defect, and handsome.

a. Jesus’ Healing Encounters

The New Testament narratives reveal that in Jesus’ time there were many oppressed or outcast groups such as foreigners and persons with disabilities, and “Jesus unfolded for society how all are to be cared for and included within the kingdom of God.”²⁰ The son of God, the Word, was made flesh in Mary’s womb because through her frailty and weakness Jesus could achieve a real encounter between God’s heart and our hearts, including the hearts of those who are waiting to become able to love and give love in return. This is the mystery of the fragility and weakness of God, as theology frequently calls it, and this is why Jesus met a large number of people marked by the limits and the evil that destroys body, spirit, and mind, and treated them, healed them, gave them the joy of life and relationships with others. Even for Jesus, surely, these encounters with the sick were a school of humanity, compassion, and experience that has certainly shaped his identity. Jesus sees, hears, loves, gives the joy of friendship, saves. For Jesus, any illness or human frailty does not deny the person their dignity, the ability to live one’s

²⁰ Ellen McBride, “Languishing for Wholeness: The Catholic Church and Persons with Disabilities,” *Liturgy* 23/2 (2008): 38-39.

life in relationship with God and with others, and the ability to look with hope to their future. Jesus is present with his love in the deep mystery of the reality of every person.

In this part where I analyze some healing encounters of Jesus, I would like to start with three different stories which highlight Jesus' novelty toward those who were marginalized. The first one, which is peculiar to Matthew, is very emblematic in the sense that it shows how the behavior of those who are not sick or disabled, toward those who are, is considered a test of faith.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" And the king will say to them in reply, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:33-40).

More than a parable, it is a representation of the final judgment, structured on the counterpoint between those who are to the right and those who are on his left. There is an opposite judgment for the two groups consisting in "Come, you who are blessed" (25:34) or "Depart from me, you accursed" (25:41) and followed by two motivations: "you cared for me" (25:36) or "you did not care for me" (25:43). The common question, "Lord, when did we see you?" is followed by the emblematic answer, "Whatever you did (or did not do) for one of these least brothers of mine, you did (or did not do) for me." The judgment that the king will make about us then is the same as we do now for marginalized people. Actually, it is we who judge the

fact, accepting them or rejecting them. The king will only ascertain what we did; he just tells us in advance in order to open our eyes to what we are doing now. We are judged by what we do to each other.

The second one is the Good Samaritan narrated by Luke 10:25-37. It is the story of a foreigner who witnesses a man who is robbed, beaten, and left half dead. A priest and a Levite enter on the scene one after the other; they both see him but then they walk by on the other side of the road, ignoring him. Then, a foreigner, a Samaritan more precisely, shows up, and after taking care of him with much love, lifts him up on his own animal, takes him to an inn and once again after caring for him, leaves to the innkeeper some money to care for him. The moral of this story is that Jesus, the Good Samaritan, reveals for us the image of God, as he has same characteristics as the God who saved Israel. It follows that now there is a new era in which all outcasts are welcome.

Finally, the third story is the parable of the Great Banquet narrated by Luke 14:15–24. It is a story of an invitation to a rich banquet which does not find a great response as all those who were invited find an excuse not to attend. Therefore, the host tells his servant to go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in from there “the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame” (14:21). When the servant reports that “still there is room,” Jesus responds, “Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in that my home may be filled. For, I tell you, none of those men who were invited will taste my dinner” (14:22–24). This passage is particularly relevant for our research, not only because it again exemplifies Jesus’ attention for those marginalized, but further expressly mentions some categories of PWD, namely, “the crippled, the blind and the lame.” In other words, by bringing this story “Luke

reminds his community and ours that Jesus radically challenged the status quo. The poor, the crippled, the blind—the so-called least of society—are in fact invited guests to the banquet.”²¹

Following a careful reading of the New Testament we certainly can find other Scripture passages related to PWD; there are some twenty-six of them,²² and these are passages or stories of meeting with Jesus, of healing, and of curing. The late William C. Spohn, who was Presidential Professor of Ethics and the Common Good at Santa Clara University, considers the healing of the sick as well as exorcisms as encounters with Jesus that parallel the stories of forgiveness, but also as “paradigms for every person who approaches Jesus conscious of sin, exclusion, limitation, and pain.”²³ In most of these narratives Jesus removes a disability from a person, and in many of them, the narratives are a retelling of the same event. In a few of them people who are cured by Jesus are in a group. Regarding individuals whom Jesus cures, their number is somewhere between thirteen and fourteen, depending once again on how the retelling

²¹ Ibid.

²² See Jennie Weiss Block, *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2002), 101. The author, who has been involved in the disability field for years as a family member of a person with a disability, writes that theological reflection on disability begins with scriptural exegesis because Scripture is the normative expression of divine revelation within the Christian tradition. It would be naïve, therefore, to think that stories from the most read book in the history of the world do not have great influence. She argues that, “the way the disability passages are often interpreted contributes to the oppression and marginalization of people with disabilities. Therefore, scriptural exegesis of the disability passages begins with a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion,’ asking a question not unlike the question posed by many feminist theologians when they inquire if Scripture, with its decidedly patriarchal bias, can be relevant and meaningful to women. Likewise, disability advocates must ask difficult questions such as: Do the Scriptures have an ‘ableist’ bias that ultimately oppresses people with disabilities? Does the focus on ‘curing and healing’ in the disability Scripture stories encourage the thinking that there is something inherently wrong with being disabled? Does the notion that there is a connection between sin, illness, and disability and the concept that there is something fundamentally wrong with being disabled contribute to the marginalization of people with disabilities? Are there ways to interpret these passages that are empowering to people with disabilities?”

²³ William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007), 132.

of the same story is assigned. The major number of narratives are told by Matthew (8), followed by Mark (6), Luke (6), and John (2).²⁴

In many of these healings Jesus acts verbally to remove the disability in question. In the case of the paralytic that friends brought to him lying on a stretcher, and narrated by Matthew, for instance, he says: “Courage, child, your sins are forgiven.” When some of the scribes accuse him of blaspheming, he questions them, “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?” and concludes, “but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.” After that the paralytic “rose and went home” (Mt 9:1-8; see also Mk 2:1-2; Lk 5:17-26).

In the case of two men who were blind, narrated only by Matthew in 9:27-31 and in 20:29-34, Jesus touches their eyes:

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed [him], crying out, “Son of David, have pity on us!” When he entered the house, the blind men approached him and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” And their eyes were opened.

In the case of a man with a “withered” hand Jesus asks the man to stretch out his hand, and it is important to note that the healing happens on the Sabbath:

And behold, there was a man there who had a withered hand. They questioned him, “Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?” so that they might accuse him. He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable a person is than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good on the

²⁴ Cf. Block, *Copious Hosting*, 105-106.

Sabbath.” Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and it was restored as sound as the other (Mt 12:9-14; see also Mk 3:1-6; 6:6-11).

There are two cases, narrated only by Mark, namely, the case of a man who was blind with a speech impediment, and another blind man at Bethsaida. In the first case Jesus takes the man aside, puts his fingers in his ears, spits, touches his tongue, and finally prays over him (7:31-37). In the second instance taking the man by the hand, Jesus goes outside of Bethsaida, puts his saliva on his eyes, and places his hand on him (8:22-26). The man who was born blind, narrated only by John 9:1-41, is healed by spreading some mud made by Jesus: “He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, ‘Go wash in the Pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see.” What is interesting, here is that only in this case does Jesus heal the person with disability without being asked.

Among all these narratives there is only one woman, who “for eighteen years had been crippled by a spirit; she was bent over, [and] completely incapable of standing erect.” Her healing once again happens on the Sabbath, and is narrated only by Luke (13:10-17). Jesus calls her a “daughter of Abraham”:

When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, “Woman, you are set free of your infirmity.” He laid his hands on her, and she at once stood up straight and glorified God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant that Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, said to the crowd in reply, “There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the Sabbath day.” The Lord said to him in reply, “Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it out for watering? This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now, ought she not to have been set free

on the Sabbath day from this bondage?” When he said this, all his adversaries were humiliated; and the whole crowd rejoiced at all the splendid deeds done by him.

This story of healing has strong parallels with Luke 6:6-11 and 14:1-6, which respectively narrate the healing of “a man whose right hand was withered,” and “a man suffering from dropsy.” This woman, unlike the other woman who was suffering from hemorrhage, does not try to touch Jesus, because of the law, and especially social pressure. Instead, she is seen and touched by Jesus. This fact highlights the patient initiative of him who has come to seek the lost children of Abraham and Sarah. This woman, but also all men and women who were closed and shrunken in themselves, are finally liberated because they are right before the one in whose image and likeness they were created.

Only one of all these healed people analyzed, has a name, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. Jesus met him while he was leaving Jericho with his disciples:

On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, “Son of David, have pity on me.” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage; get up, he is calling you.” He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way (Mk 10:46-52; see also Lk 18:35-43 where his name is not given).

b. Healings in Acts and Paul's "Disability"

Following Christ's death and resurrection, at the very first steps of the Church, encouraged by the Risen Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles "in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean" (Acts 3:6) heal some PWD. Keep in mind that these healings happened on the footsteps of Jesus, who in his earthly time after healing many disabilities, touching the lives of many PWD, suffered extreme physical pain in the process of crucifixion (Mt 26:37-68; 27:26-32). Though sinless himself, he suffered the judgment of God the Father for sin (Mt 27:46; 2 Cor 5:21), and in his own death accomplished the death of death (Rm 3:17).²⁵ Acts 3 narrates an encounter between Peter and John, and a man "crippled" from birth, a beggar, while they were going up to the temple area. As the beggar asked them for alms, Peter and John "looked intently at him" and invited him to look at them as well. Peter told him, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, (rise and) walk." Thereupon, "Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God" (3:1-8).

In this episode, the compassion of Peter and John together looking at the disabled man results in the healing of the latter, and it is quite significant as it shows the importance of a compassionate community in the life of disabled people. After this healing, in Act 5:15 we notice that people "carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them." Some scholars see the shadow of Peter as the shadow of the beneficent cloud which had accompanied Israel in the

²⁵ Edward Hersh and Rosemarie Scotti Hughes, "The Role of Suffering and Disability: Evidence from Scripture," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 9/3 (2005): 89.

desert: “The cloud is incarnated first in Jesus under whose shadow it is restored, and then in the disciples. The cloud is the power of God for man and woman who lets himself or herself be led by the Holy Spirit toward this alternative way to live.”²⁶

Concerning the Apostle Paul, it is enough to mention that his experience, when God blinded his eyes on one of his journeys to persecute Christians (Acts 9:3-9), was so powerful for him at that point as to influence all his theological perspective on suffering. Throughout his letters, indeed, are conveyed the hardships that Paul faced and the evidence of his finding Christ in his sufferings. In 2 Corinthians, for instance, Paul says, “Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated” (12:7). Although Paul “three times begged the Lord about this, that it might leave [him], the Lord answered him by saying, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (12:8-9). This encouragement by God provoked Paul to acclaim, “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10). Some scholars interpret the thorn Paul mentioned as a loss of eyesight; in this way God demonstrated his abilities through Paul’s disabilities:

Where Paul thought he needed his eyesight, God may have desired to show His power by helping Paul in other ways. Sometimes the miracle is God giving the day to day strength one needs to endure one’s losses and trust God for other means of having one’s needs met. Paul delighted in hardship as a lifestyle, while suffering beatings, imprisonment, degradation in his evangelization and travels, and eventually, in being put to death. To Paul, God’s strength was perfected in his weakness.²⁷

²⁶ Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, S.J., *Fino ai confini estremi: meditazioni sugli Atti degli apostoli* (Bologna: EDB, 2008), 72.

²⁷ Hersh and Scotti Hughes, “The Role of Suffering and Disability,” 88-89.

Regarding the link between sin and disability one can see that just as the Old Testament, so also the New supports the link between sin and disability. By way of example, among others apropos of blindness, I'd like to mention John 9, the chapter that narrates the story of the man born blind. The question of the disciples is emblematic for it anticipates a connection between disability and sin: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The question itself suggests that disability was widely considered as a punishment meant for some unspecified sin.²⁸ There are further narratives in the New Testament in which to find the same juxtaposition: in the case of the paralytic man let down on his mat from the roof (Mk 2:1-12) when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven" (2:5). In Jn 5:14 after healing the man laying by the pool of Bethesda who was sick for thirty-eight years, Jesus said, "Look, you are well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may happen to you." One can see that all these healings preceded by recognition or evidence of sins make one think that in a certain way it was necessary first to remove sin before healing the disability. Furthermore, the same juxtaposition between sin and disability may be seen by many as confirmation of an eventual punishment inflicted upon an individual or family by God following a sin. Going back to the question posed by the disciples in John 9, however, Block points out that, Jesus as he often does, in his response first departs from the thinking of his time, then very quickly and clearly refutes the idea that the man's blindness is a consequence of his or his parents' sin:

He goes on to suggest there is another way of looking at this situation. What is the meaning of the second part of the answer Jesus gives: 'so that God's work might be manifest in him?' Jesus deals with the particular case in question by naming the purpose of the man's blindness

²⁸ See Otieno, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability."

as an opportunity to make God's work visible in him.... As in many other passages, the removal of the disability is used as a method of Christological identification.²⁹

In the final analysis, however, the biblical and theological points of view on disability are not limited only to those which lead to a “discriminatory and exclusive approach” to viewing PWD. In the Bible and in the theological reflections based on the Scriptures there are also other perspectives that take an “emancipatory and inclusive approach” to disability issues.³⁰ The inclusivity of PWD is seen in God's plan for the restoration of the Israelites, in which God assures the remnant of the Israelites in Babylon that their homeland would be restored to them and that they would return to Jerusalem: “Look! I will bring them back from the land of the north; I will gather them from the ends of the earth, the blind and the lame in their midst, pregnant women, together with those in labor—an immense throng—they shall return” (Jer 31:8). In the New Testament the aforementioned parable of the Great Feast, which can be read as an indication of the place of PWD in the Kingdom of God: “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame” (Lk 14:21).

After analyzing some relevant passages and narratives related to disability and PWD in both Old and New Testaments, now I would like to consider some other sources of Catholic teaching, as above in the case of Islam.

²⁹ Block, *Copious Hosting*, 111-112.

³⁰ See Otieno, “Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability.”

C) The Magisterium and PWD

1. Canon Law

Regarding disability in Canon Law, I found different and thought-provoking issues related to PWD. For instance, a pastor's obligation to provide religious instruction to PWD. Canon Law states that it is the pastor's obligation to provide for catechetical formation for persons with disabilities: "It is a proper and grave duty especially of pastors of souls to take care of the catechesis of the Christian people so that the living faith of the faithful becomes manifest and active through doctrinal instruction and the experience of Christian life" (c. 773).

Afterward, the Code goes on to specify groups within the parish community that should be given particular attention. Canon 777, 4^o states that the pastor, in accord with norms established by the diocesan bishop, is to ensure "that catechetical instruction is given also to those who are physically or mentally impeded, insofar as their condition permits." This requires pastors to provide religious education for persons with disabilities. However, these two canons should be read along with John Paul II's *Redemptor hominis* (RH) 19, which noted the responsibility that all the people of God have about catechesis by encouraging Catholic believers to take increasing care that the various forms of catechesis and its various fields -- beginning with the fundamental field, family catechesis, that is the catechesis by parents of their children -- should give evidence of the universal sharing by the whole of the People of God in the prophetic office of Christ himself.

Another issue to bring to attention is the so-called "impediments" to the priesthood. These impediments are divided into "irregularities," which are permanent unless removed by the competent authority and "simple impediments" which may pass with time without any action by

an ecclesiastical authority. According to canon 1040, indeed, “those affected by any impediment, whether perpetual, which is called an irregularity, or simple, are prevented from receiving orders.” Canon Law lists various impediments to the exercise of a priesthood that has already been conferred. Among irregularities, mental illness that prevents fulfillment of the duties of the priesthood, and physical incapacity to perform the rites of the Church are both related to disability. Canon 1041, 1° establishes that “a person who labors under some form of amentia or other psychic illness due to which, after experts have been consulted, he is judged unqualified to fulfill the ministry properly” is irregular for receiving orders. Canon 1029, though, states that being “endowed with physical and psychic qualities in keeping with the order to be received” is necessary to be promoted to orders, “in the prudent judgment of their own bishop or of the competent major superior.”

As is taught in *Optatam totius* (OT), bishops “must assist without stint those whom they have judged to be called to the Lord’s work” (OT 2). They are also called upon to determine the suitability, conditions of nature and grace, of the candidates to the sacred order. On the other hand, since to receive Holy Orders is not an individual right, therefore, the bishop or the competent superior may forbid admission to holy orders to those who are devoid of the qualities required. Some scholars, instead, while they appreciate the set of exclusions “pertaining to those human, moral, and spiritual qualities conducive for ministry in service to the gospel,” consider “questionable” others pertaining to “qualities befitting an inherited able-bodied and able-minded normativity.”

Applying a hermeneutic of suspicion, however much experts may be consulted for such a determination, the tendency by many in positions of authority to rely upon a medical model of judgment when a man with a disability presents himself as a candidate for study and

subsequent orders must be interrogated. That is, these canons rely on an ableist set of norms that discriminate on the basis of criteria that have been found lacking in justice.³¹

In this regard, according to Archbishop Bruno Forte, currently Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto, and a Consultant to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, these rules are not designed to exclude anyone, they simply say what are the necessary conditions. In fact, the Magisterium of the Church has always supported the dignity of every human person whatever his physical and mental condition: “so much so that the Church says a net ‘no’ to all forms of suppression of life and says a persuaded ‘yes’ to any form of recognition and support for the dignity of the person.” Regarding the conditions for admission to the priesthood, however, Forte points out that “if a person is not *compos sui*, it is clear that he cannot be the reference point of a community that finds in the priest the solidification point of its various components, capable of attention, listening, discernment, and equilibrium.” The issue of mental condition “would apply to every human task of responsibility and is not in any way a judgment or a devaluation of human dignity.” With regard to physical disabilities, “the limiting conditions of each presiding action, for example the Eucharist, may be considered by the Church not congruent with ordination. To give just one example, it would become very difficult for a person who has no means to talk, to be able to preach the word of God.”³²

³¹ Iozzio, “Catholicism and Disability,” 122.

³² Ivano Abbadesse, “Può un disabile diventare sacerdote?” March 4, 2013, <http://www.west-info.eu/it/puo-un-disabile-diventare-sacerdote/>. In the continuation of the interview given to Ivano Abbadesse, the archbishop points out that the Church reserves the right to consider cases always with great attention. In this sense, the final judgment remains with the ordaining bishop who takes advantage of all the reports needed to get to a balanced examination, founded on the basis of medical and psychological counseling if necessary. As the Church “has always been shown to have great wisdom, in cases in which there is a need to ask for special dispensations from the Holy See, the bishop makes himself the bearer of this request if the necessary elements to do that have been established.” According to Archbishop Forte, it follows that, “there would be no form of discrimination or prejudicial refusal, but simply an attention to those physical

Having considered one of the seven sacraments of CC, holy orders, now I would like to consider others from a pastoral-liturgical and canonical perspective. Concerning the administration of sacraments, as canon 1024 says, “a baptized male alone receives sacred ordination;” except baptism which may be administered also by laymen as well as by lay women; all others can be administered only by the clergy. In the case of the Sacrament of Matrimony, it is the bride and bridegroom who perform the marriage, however, the validity of a marriage relies on whether the Church has a witness at the wedding ceremony whose function is to question the couple to ensure that they have no obstacle to marriage and that they are freely choosing to wed each other. *Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC) formulates that,

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism (SC 14).

In that case, it is expected that pastors ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects. The expression “all the faithful” should be understood to include those with disabilities. In effect, from the point of view of the human dimension of “integral humanism,” taken into consideration by the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference, it can be said that the disability is not a ‘distance,’ but it is a possibility of another presence: the blind person sees beyond, people with

or mental disabilities which are effectively disabling the exercise of the ministry and the desire to serve and promote the good of whole communities and individuals.”

motor disability experience another gait, people with intellectual disability experience a different way of relating. In short, PWD are diverse-skilled, and as such are recognized and valued.³³

Of itself baptism is given to children without asking for any kind of personal acceptance. The family and the community are the guarantors of the faith; therefore, any kind of mental disability, however serious, may not be a sufficient reason to exclude anyone.³⁴ The Eucharist is one of the unifying sacraments of the Church and, according to Catholic doctrine, was instituted by Jesus Christ, who is present “truly, really and substantially,” as a whole unity, that is, body, blood, soul, and divinity, in the species, under the appearances of the bread and wine. This mysterious and supernatural presence is by way of the so-called transubstantiation. One of the very special features of this sacrament is its permanence, because in it the real presence of Jesus Christ endures. The minister of consecration is a priest, and in order for the Eucharist to be valid he must have at least the intention of doing what the Church intends. That being said, while canon 912 establishes that any baptized person not prohibited by law can and must be admitted to holy communion, canon 913 §1 emphasizes “sufficient knowledge” as well as “understanding” of the mystery of Christ “according to [their] capacity.” In this regard, in the pastoral application it is quite enough that they recognize communion as a “special bread.”

Canon 914 provides that “it is for the pastor to exercise vigilance so that children who have not attained the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed do not approach holy communion.” This point is quite sensitive, and even PWD should access, after proper preparation, this sacrament which is the center of Christian life. Therefore, in the first place especially two extremes must be avoided: firstly, asking PWD to achieve a level of awareness equal to that of any other baptized; secondly, assuming in advance that no level of preparation is

³³ Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale, *L'iniziazione cristiana alle persone disabili*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

possible. Consequently, (1) refusing the Eucharist with the idea that “he or she does not understand enough,” or (2) considering it “not necessary” with a pietistic idea that “now or then, he or she will be saved in any case,” and finally (3) agreeing to give the Eucharist without any preparation, thus negating the ability to know and love God, must be avoided.³⁵

Characteristics of “understanding” and “capacity” are required also for marriage as “the consent of the parties, legitimately manifested between persons qualified by law, makes marriage” (c. 1057 §1) and “matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other through an irrevocable covenant in order to establish marriage (§2). Therefore, the consensus is the more decisive element of the marriage covenant, the one that contains its real causal efficacy. Furthermore, “no human power is able to supply this consent” (c. 1057 §1).

In a nutshell, as Iozzio also argues, “in these ways, people with disabilities may be denied access to the sacraments,”³⁶ especially when marriage is in question. However, regarding the sacraments of Christian initiation, the need and the opportunity to receive baptism, “the gateway to the sacraments and necessary for salvation” (c. 849), and Confirmation, also given to those who do not have the use of reason (c. 889 § 2), is not subject to doubts. The grace of God through the sacraments and the faith of the Church justifies, and is a true realization of the foreseeing love of the Father, even if the possibility of an answer by humans is absent or unclear (cf. c. 871).³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 10.

³⁶ Iozzio, “Catholicism and Disability,” 124.

³⁷ Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale, *L’iniziazione cristiana alle persone disabili*, 29.

2. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

The CSD, which aspires to present an overview of Catholic social teaching (CST), was published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace following the request of John Paul II. The document was preceded by a number of papal documents beginning with the “first” modern social encyclical by Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* (1891) and his successors up to John Paul II in *Laborem exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), and *Centesimus annus* (1991) wherein Pope John Paul II expanded upon the Church’s social teaching. The CSD is divided into three parts, and it specifically deals with questions concerning life in society, such as the Church as the mission of Jesus Christ and its social doctrine, the human person and human rights, the family in society.

CSD, n. 148, points out that persons with disabilities are fully human subjects, with rights and duties and “in spite of the limitations and sufferings affecting their bodies and faculties, they point up more clearly the dignity and greatness of man [and woman].”³⁸ Therefore, they are to be helped to participate in every dimension of family and social life at every level accessible to them and according to their possibilities. In this regard, CSD considers as “radically unworthy of [humans] and a denial of common humanity” to admit to the life of the community, and to work, only those who are fully functional. According to CSD, as PWD are fully human subjects, they too “need to love and to be loved, they need tenderness, closeness and intimacy,” therefore, great attention must be paid also to their affective and sexual dimensions.

In chapter six, dedicated to human work, which is a fundamental right enhancing human dignity (n. 287), CSD denounces the difficulties of labor inclusion, particularly of disability.

³⁸ For this and all following quotations from CSD see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 2005).

According to CSD those who are unemployed or underemployed suffer the profound negative consequences that such a situation creates in a personality and consequently they run the risk of being marginalized within society, of becoming victims of social exclusion. In general, this is the drama that strikes not only young people, but among many others such as women, immigrants and ex-convicts; it particularly affects those persons with disabilities as they “face greater difficulties in the attempt to find their place in the world of employment” (n. 289).

As the Church’s social doctrine constantly points to the need to respect the dignity of children, particular attention is paid in CSD to children. The family is the first place, a “community of persons,” where children develop an esteem for their personal dignity as well as a respect and concern for their rights. This is valid for all children but “it becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more it is in need of everything, when it is sick, suffering or handicapped.” CSD insists that the rights of children must be legally protected within juridical systems and invites all countries to recognize the social value of childhood and their right to be born in a real family (n. 244).

The Church is therefore particularly attentive to the phenomenon and, as is already noted by some scholars, “many of these teachings are rooted in liberation theologies with reflection on the common good in light of the preferential option for those who are poor and otherwise vulnerable.”³⁹ However, the fact that the Holy See has not yet signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force on May 8, 2006, creates problems.⁴⁰ Although the Holy See recognizes the fact that the Convention is an important step on the way to equal opportunities for many PWD in the world, it maintains firmly its position that one of the

³⁹ Iozzio, “Catholicism and Disability,” 124.

⁴⁰ As of March 2017, it has 160 signatories and 172 parties, which includes 171 states and the European Union.

most important aspects of the text include insistence on personal safety and life, through the access of PWD in poverty to support from the state in economic, psychological, and health care. The critical points, in fact, of the text reside in articles nn. 23 and 25 concerning family planning and the right to operate this. In particular, the Vatican criticizes the phrase “sexual and reproductive health” linked to disability because in many countries health services also involve abortion. In this regard “It is tragic,” says, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in New York, “in a situation where an imperfection of a fetus may be a condition for an abortion, the same Convention created to protect persons with disabilities from all discrimination regarding the exercise of their rights may be used to deny the basic right of unborn PWD to life.”⁴¹

3. Catechism of the Catholic Church

The CCC considers family as “the original cell of social life,” in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. One of the main characteristics of the family is its being an initiation into life in society. Therefore, the family “should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor.” Concerning those families, and they are many, who are not always capable of providing this help, CCC encourages other persons and families in charity to help them in a subsidiary way in order to provide for their needs (CCC 2207-2208).⁴²

⁴¹ Simona Santi, “Ambiguità sull’aborto: la Santa Sede non firma la convenzione Onu sulla disabilità,” *Korazym*, December 2, 2008, <http://www.korazym.org/939/ambiguita-sullaborto-la-santa-sede-non-firma-la-convenzione-onu-sulla-disabilita/>.

⁴² For this and all following quotations from CCC, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994).

This perspective of reaching them is pointed out also for people whose “lives are diminished or weakened [and who therefore] deserve special respect.” Some of these people are desperate because of their conditions and lack of brotherly support based on love and “in order to eliminate [their] suffering” may consider euthanasia, which is contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator.” It follows that “sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible” and surrounded by love in its diverse expressions shown by their communities (CCC 2226-2227).

Another issue where CCC mentions PWD is work in terms of employment and access to professions. As the magisterium points out on various occasions PWD hold rights and duties, and in spite of their limitations and sufferings, they point up more clearly the dignity and greatness of man and woman. Since persons with disabilities are subjects with all their rights, they should be helped to participate in social life in all dimensions. In this sense, work is a fundamental right, which gives a possibility of integration and social status as well as subsistence, and provides a possibility of functional relationships to life motivation.

Whereas today’s technologies could greatly facilitate job placement, as unfortunately very often happens, the organization of work does not aid disabled people. It follows that, according to CCC, “access to employment and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment” (CCC 2433).

4. Preparatory Documents for the “Jubilee Day” of 2000

The Great Jubilee in 2000 was a major event in the CC, held from Christmas Eve of 1999 to Epiphany of 2001. Preparation for the Great Jubilee began with Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* of 1994 with which the Pope invited the Church to begin a three-year period of intensive preparation for the celebration of the third Christian millennium. The major innovation in this Jubilee was the addition of many particular Jubilees for various groups of persons, among which was the “Jubilee Day of the Community of Persons with Disabilities” held on December 3, 2000. The process of this particular jubilee saw five preparatory documents which provide a broad understanding of the CC’s perspective, if not almost “a theology on disabilities,”⁴³ and therefore merit to be analyzed for this research.

From a broad perspective, these documents highlight the following major points: (1) PWD are a richness for the entire Church and society as these are challenged by their existence to be open to the mystery they present. (2) Rich in humanity, PWD are the place of the wonders of God and they are persons. (3) Disability is a privilege rather than a punishment. (4) The truth and reality related to PWD are to be discovered from a biblical-theological perspective and the Church intends to be a help in this direction. (5) The Church also desires to reconcile with them for failings in their regard, to valorize the gifts they bring, and to encourage an attitude of caring, assistance, and solidarity.

What is thought-provoking in these documents is that disability is seen as a “privilege” and a “place” where God manifests God’s “love and crowns all with the glory of the resurrection” (Committee, Part I), “where humanity receives the strongest pushes and resources for a world based on solidarity, hope and love” (Committee, Part II), “in which to meet ‘the mystery of faith’

⁴³ Iozzio, “Catholicism and Disability,” 132.

to be lived to the full in the daily life of the Church and society” (Committee, Part IV), and finally “where normality and stereotypes are challenged and the Church and society are moved to search for that crucial point at which the human person is fully himself [and herself]” (Committee, Part V). It follows that the person with disabilities, “created in God’s image, in whom God’s love is made manifest and who is a privileged witness of humanity, is directly responsible for his [or her] history and his [or her] life just like any other person” (Committee, Part III).

The first preparatory document starting from the consideration of man and woman as created in the image and likeness of God, and “crowned” by God with love, points out that, alongside such greatness, glory, and honor, we human beings also experience pain, sickness, and limitation, among which “with all its queries, is mental or physical disability or a combination of both.” As the sin of our first parents with all its consequences and responsibilities had the power to dim, but not eliminate, this image, therefore also in our limitations the splendor of God is revealed. This is why, the Church which continues the mission of Christ must consider PWD and those around them, as theological places where “God works his wonders,” realizes God’s love for humankind, and invites the community to conversion and to discernment of Gospel values (cf. Committee, Part I).

The second preparatory document then considers PWD as “privileged witnesses of humanity.” Refusing firmly a commonly-accepted logic according to which only a person who has possessions, has achieved success, has information and manipulates it for his own profit... only such a person has value, and is someone:

Their difficulties and disharmony are a counter-witness to the ephemeral fashion of beauty as mere estheticism, but at the same time they indicate a more profound harmony, revealing,

beyond all phenomenal contingency, the ultimate and founding consistence of the person as ontological value.... He or she affirms the value of life over and above any determination of functionality and efficiency (cf. Committee, Part II).

The third preparatory document then recognizes in PWD their richness to give the most powerful impulse offering great moral and spiritual resources for a world according to God's plan, particularly in a society where what counts is physical beauty, self-affirmation, search for power, and dominion over others. Consequently, it states that PWD have every right to be subject-active agents in ministry. As they are not only the receivers of the Gospel, but they in turn also proclaim the Gospel with their life and mission, the document rightly encourages that "through the activity of which they are capable according to their possibilities, persons with disabilities can be active subjects of pastoral work" (cf. Committee, Part III).

According to the fourth document, one of the commitments of the Church is helping to overcome situations of isolation and rejection. Therefore, believers need to be helped to discover the inviolable dignity of every human person, including those with disabilities, and of their rights: the right to life, to work, to education, the right to build a family, to take part in public life, the right to religious freedom: "This calls for the full inclusion of PWD in ecclesial life as responsible subjects, and with the same rights and duties and the same fundamental mission common to all the baptized, and also with a personal vocation to fulfil" (cf. Committee, Part IV).

Finally, the fifth preparatory document, starting from the fact that all countries with a well-developed juridical order accept PWD as belonging, in parity, to social communities in their legal, associative, ecclesial, or spontaneous expressions, encourage both ecclesiastic and civil communities to develop it more along the following lines: (1) a conscious acceptance which consists in recognition of PWD as bearers of the Christian message of the relationship with God,

(2) a personal solidarity based on a fraternal parity, (3) an assistance aimed to call the community to its moral and political duties (cf. Committee, Part V).

Through the focus I have given so far on the preparatory documents, among others, two relevant points emerge: (1) education and (2) participation of PWD in the liturgy. Analyzing the Code of Canon Law from a disability perspective we have already mentioned those canons related to the administration of sacraments and access of PWD to them. At this point, I would like to dedicate some space especially to the education of PWD. It will also give us opportunity to make further considerations on some other instances of the Magisterium.

5. Education of PWD

The first and particularly rich source of a focus on education for PWD would be the Scripture in order to better understand in theological-ecclesiological terms the duty of the Church to educate the people of God. This, indeed, is rich with pedagogical, educational and didactical insights as God educates the people through an educational journey (Dt 32:10-12). The tradition of the CC, by relying on the Scripture and nourishing itself from it, in its turn, has grown up as another rich source. Vatican II's decree *Gravissimum educationis* (GE) for instance, first of all highlights the "inalienable" right of all men and women of every race, condition, and age to have an education in virtue of their dignity as human beings. Then it recalls the aims of education which consist in "formation of the human person in the pursuit of his [and her] ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man [or woman], he [or she] is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he [or she] will share" (GE 1). In its turn, *Gaudium et spes* (GS) points out that the formation of the human person is necessary as "it remains each man's [and woman's] duty to retain an understanding of the whole human person in which the values of intellect, will,

conscience, and fraternity are preeminent. These values are all rooted in God the Creator and have been wonderfully restored and elevated in Christ” (*GS* 61).

In virtue of its teaching duty, as mentioned above, to fulfill the educational task, the Church has

in a special way, the duty of educating, not merely because she must be recognized as a human society capable of educating, but especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men [and women], of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting men [and women] to be able to come to the fullness of this life (*GE* 3).

In the documents related to disability we find the same aim, that is, the development of PWD in all dimensions, physical, moral, and spiritual faculties:

[I]n the various forms of treatment, as also in the various educational and social means employed to eliminate handicaps, it is always the dignity, welfare and total development of the handicapped person, in all his or her dimensions and physical, moral and spiritual faculties, that must be primarily considered, protected and promoted.⁴⁴

Preventing these disabilities and fostering the health of the spirit signifies and implies unified and creative effort in favor of integral education, and an environment, human relations and means of communication in which the person is not damaged in his or her more profound needs and aspirations—in the first place moral and spiritual ones—and in which the person is not submitted to violence which can end by compromising his or her interior balance and dynamism.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Document of the Holy See for the International Year of Disabled Persons: To all Who Work for the Disabled* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1981), 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

On the other hand, as Monica Collini, an Italian scholar in education at the University of Verona and collaborator of the diocese of Trent for pastoral catechesis in the area of disability, points out, magisterial orientations inspire the pastoral practice, the experience accumulated by the Church in host communities, in male and female religious congregations, in social solidarity cooperatives, non-governmental organizations of Christian inspiration, etc. Nevertheless, the documents do not enter into the merits of the formal elements of the educational issue or illustrate actual problems, but simply state the need for an integral education generalizing the commitment of civil society and the ecclesial community. Finally, very often, the invitation to articulate a pastoral program in this sector produces marginal and generic results.⁴⁶

On the other hand, the magisterial orientations deriving from the renewal of Vatican II concerning Christian initiation and participation of PWD in the liturgical-sacramental life of the Church, contain enriching insights as well as give some hope and enthusiasm for the future. In this regard, I already mentioned canon 777, which is to ensure “that catechetical instruction is given also to those who are physically or mentally impeded, insofar as their condition permits.” The same emphasis was given also by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation on catechesis, *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT): “Children and young people who are physically or mentally handicapped ... have a right, like others of their age, to know ‘the mystery of faith.’ The greater difficulties that they encounter give greater merit to their efforts and to those of their teachers” (CT 41). According to the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), furthermore, an adequate catechesis for those who experience handicaps, physical or mental, as well as other

⁴⁶ See Monica Collini, *Oltre il limite: la Chiesa e l'handicap* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2005), 96-97.

forms of disability, especially children, is possible only thanks to a growth in social and ecclesial consciousness, together with undeniable progress in specialized pedagogy.⁴⁷

Regarding the pontificate of Pope Francis, one can see that he intervened on different occasions on disability and PWD, and his words were often accompanied by loving gestures which garnered the attention of mass media as well as of public opinion. In the specific case of PWD and their rights to be educated and to participate in the liturgy, the most relevant intervention of Pope Francis was in 2016 during a special Mass for persons with physical and mental disabilities, on the occasion of the Holy Year of Mercy. Pope Francis said, “The way we experience illness and disability is an index of the love we are ready to offer,” therefore refusing the sacraments to persons with mental illnesses or conditions is “discrimination.” The pontiff complained that there are those who believe anything imperfect should be “kept apart, in some ‘enclosure,’” so they don’t hold back the pace of a false well-being. The day before, while addressing PWD, following a question posed by a young woman in a wheelchair about why some disabled people aren’t able to receive Communion or go to Mass, Pope Francis said that those priests and parishes which refuse to give catechesis to the disabled are called “to conversion.” The pontiff then said that everyone has the same ability to grow and understand Christian doctrine, even if the learning processes are different: “Diversity doesn’t mean that those who have the five senses are better than those who are deaf, we all have the possibility of loving God.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See Congregation for The Clergy, “General Directory for Catechesis,” n. 189, www.vatican.va.

⁴⁸ Francis, “Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis,” Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Jubilee for the Sick and Persons with Disabilities, St Peter’s Square, June 12, 2016, www.vatican.va; see also Inés San Martín, “Pope Says the Disabled Should Have Access to the Sacraments,” *Crux* June 12, 2016, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2016/06/12/pope-says-disabled-must-access-sacraments/>.

In a nutshell, considering globally these statements one can see that the Church takes seriously into account issues related to PWD, and the “systematic explication of the Christian message to PWD is a constant preoccupation for the Church.”⁴⁹

6. The Church toward PWD in Turkey

The CC is organized at the global level through different institutions to support and encourage many Catholic organizations and associations in their efforts to help PWD. By doing so the Church aims to promote the commonality of diversities, to perfect the charitable behaviors of its believers toward those who are in need, as well as to witness to the world that the true love deriving from the Gospel is able to overcome all. As our focus is the context of Turkey, before proceeding with the problem of evil and suffering from a CC perspective I would like to conclude this section with some considerations about CC’s initiatives in this country. Unfortunately, there are no official documents, statements, or pastoral letters issued by Turkish bishops on disability and PWD either in the past or currently. So far, the issue is at a level of documents completely ignored by bishops’ conference of Turkey, which is currently focused and thoroughly committed to the bigger problem of Syrian refugees. However, this detail does not change the fact that the diocese of Izmir, the apostolic vicariates of Istanbul and Anatolia, along with the Armenian Churches try to help PWD and their families.

Relying on Scripture and the teaching of the CC on the creation of men and women in the image and likeness of God, and their consequent human dignity, the archbishop of Izmir, a Dominican philosopher Lorenzo Piretto, points out that society has a responsibility to protect human dignity at all levels. This responsibility is much bigger when there is question of those

⁴⁹ Collini, *Oltre il limite*, 124.

who are vulnerable. Society's duty consists primarily of helping families by funding necessary and competent institutions. In that way, those who are more vulnerable, for instance, PWD, can much easier access their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. The Church, in virtue of its being a society founded by Christ, has the responsibility to realize a fraternity among all human beings. Therefore, it is committed to improve the situation of PWD. Throughout the history of the Church, there have been many institutions and religious orders to realize this duty. These groups should follow developments in technology and medicine and renew their commitment and appropriate services according to these developments.⁵⁰

On the other hand, in an email message to the author on March 8, 2017, Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, apostolic vicar of Anatolia, revealed that in his personal contacts with PWD in Turkey he discovered firstly that "the person with disability is a person like any other. His [and her] challenges, his [and her] inner world, his [and her] desires and emotional needs, his [and her] doubts about the existence and goodness of God, his [and her] fears and hopes ... are like those of all." Comparing them with young people who have no disability, are beautiful, and have a thousand possibilities, he noticed that these latter were full of fear, lack of meaning in life, with poor self-esteem, blocked on many fronts. On the contrary, most of PWD he met were filled with love of life, of faith in God, aware of their capabilities, active and creative, with a great desire to practice a sport, have fun, etc. "So, I was helped to understand that the human person is not defined at the level of athleticism and that 'normality' is quite a myth, built on statistics which capture only one of the many aspects of life." Following these experiences with PWD, Bizzeti

⁵⁰ Archbishop Lorenzo Piretto, O.P., "Engellilik ve Türkiye'deki Hristiyanlar: Latin cemaati örneği," in *Din, felsefe ve bilim ışığında engelli olmak ve sorunları sempozyumu bildirileri*, ed. Mehmet Mazak (Istanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2012), 68.

confesses that he does not use anymore willingly the terms “handicapped” or “disabled,” but according to him the most appropriate term of “differently abled.”

Concerning the religions, Bizzeti recognizes that religions are all tempted to face handicaps in terms of piety, charity, humanitarian aid and they basically think that diversity comes from evil and sin. Instead, the person with a “handicap” is above all a gift that forces us to question our constitutive limit and the fragility of the human condition, our inability to salvage our lives: “we are constantly reminded that we all have to deal with diversity because life is not based on homogeneity but on differentiation. This invites us to come to terms with the irreducibility of ‘other,’ and of ‘Other.’ In this sense, the person bearing a ‘handicap’ is an icon of God, a person so different from us to challenge all our presumptions of us being the measure of everything.”⁵¹

The major Latin Catholic charitable institution operating in Turkey for decades has been Caritas Turkey, which shares the mission of the Church. It is an ordered service to the community, inspired by the Gospel values and CST, which responds to disasters, promotes integral human development, and advocates on the causes of poverty and conflict. Caritas in Turkey works with a variety of groups needing support: refugees, migrants, abused women, children, the elderly, handicapped people, and minorities. Caritas Turkey helps to provide services in the fields of emergencies, health, education, social adjustment, and employment. Since 1991, Caritas Turkey has been working for refugees mostly coming from Iraq along with those coming from Syria following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011.⁵² In collaboration with a Turkish donor, Caritas Turkey opened a school in Izmir for children with autism, where about 200 students receive education and rehabilitation. Furthermore, the Dominican Friars in Izmir offer every year their summer house to the students of this school without any

⁵¹ Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, S.J., e-mail message to author, March 8, 2017.

⁵² Caritas Internationalis, “Caritas Turkey,” <http://www.caritas.org/where-we-are/europe/turkey/>.

discrimination based on their religious identity, language, and race. Last but not least, Caritas Turkey has been running formation courses for those parents who have children with autism and/or other disabilities.

A letter sent by the director of the aforementioned school, Mr. Sadettin Akçi, to Archbishop Piretto, and shared by the latter during a symposium in Istanbul on PWD is thought-provoking, since it provides a tremendous vision of PWD and their families in Turkish society as well as demonstrates the importance of the Latin Catholic Church's commitment and contribution to current Turkish society:

We have 185 children with autism, of which the parents of eighty-four have divorced because of the disability of their children; eighty-two of them have been abandoned by their fathers; and two of them by their mothers. Most of them come from very poor families. They do not visit families with nondisabled children nor can they host them. Vacations are a dream for them. Thanks to you, until the school opened up these families were closed up in their homes, untied from society and embittered toward God. Many parents were willing to kill themselves and their children as two families had already done. We are grateful to you, and we all hope that for this generosity of yours, *inshallah*, all of you will go to Heaven.⁵³

Another institution related to the Latin Catholic Church in Turkey is *La Paix*. The only French hospital left standing in Istanbul, *La Paix* was built at the time of the Crimean War in the mid-19th century. Sultan Abdülmecid granted the estate via an official decree to a group of Roman Catholic nuns known as the Daughters of Charity, who were helping to treat wounded troops in the war.⁵⁴ *La Paix*, among others, hosts some patients with chronic mental disabilities. Although the institution still does not possess proper instruments for their rehabilitation, the

⁵³ Piretto, "Engellilik ve Türkiye'deki Hristiyanlar," 70-71.

⁵⁴ Vercihan Ziflioğlu, "French Hospital Struggling for Life in Turkey," *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 15, 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/>.

Latin Catholic Church continues to support efforts made by the hospital. Beside the dioceses of Izmir and the apostolic vicariate of Istanbul, the apostolic vicariate of Anatolia, which is facing a large number of Syrian and Chaldean refugees, is committed to help PWD and their families by organizing summer camps for youth and European volunteers. Even though these activities are not so institutionalized, they are still very significant as they witness the humble but charitable presence of the CC in Turkish society.⁵⁵

Concerning the Armenian community in Turkey, without distinguishing between Armenian Catholics and so-called Apostolic Armenians, there is ZİBEÇ, a center which serves children with mental and physical disabilities by following their development, giving them a life, and a new family love. Founded about 15 years ago through the sacrifice of the Armenian people in Turkey, ZİBEÇ operates under the roof of the Surp Pirgiç Hospital -- another significant Armenian institution in Istanbul since 1832 -- and provides children classes in English, computer, jewelry design, relief, ceramic painting as well as ergo-therapy lessons as part of a project aimed at providing mentally and physically handicapped children with social and vocational education so that they can reside on their own.⁵⁶ Currently, the community in Istanbul has some 100 mentally and physically disabled children of various ages, and ZİBEÇ does not ask any fee for their care and education. In an email message to the author on March 7, 2017, Boghos Levon Zekiyan, archbishop of the Armenian Catholic Archeparchy of Istanbul wrote that, “the grand opening of this institution toward the Turkish Muslim world in general, gives us

⁵⁵ Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program (IIMP) and three facilities of health activities, Artisan, Fransız Fakirhanesi, and Saint George Hospital are other charitable organizations which serve people in need among them also PWD.

⁵⁶ Rober Koptaş, “Yeryüzü cennetimiz ZİBEÇ,” *AGOS*, September 24, 2012, <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/8856/yeryuzu-cennetimiz-zibec>.

good suggestions on an eventual dialogue based on disease in general (this certainly) and especially on disability.”⁵⁷

D) The Problem of Evil and Suffering

The problem of evil, which in very general terms is developed around the idea that afflictions or misfortunes cannot be reconciled with a good God, has occupied theological reflections of Christians throughout many centuries. Men and women looking around and experiencing in their lives catastrophes such as earthquakes, floods, hunger, and drought, as well as wars and genocides, have been questioning continuously but without reaching satisfying conclusions. Even though most of these afflictions are explained or at least are seen as natural disasters, the presence of evil and the related suffering of human beings in a world created and governed by God pose actually serious problems as they affect negatively God’s existence and God’s fundamental characteristics (especially God’s goodness, omnipotence, knowledge, wisdom, and might).

The dilemma has been investigated by philosophers and among them Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) is considered one of the pioneers who touched the issue first. Transmitted to our days by Lactantius (A.D. 260-340) Epicurus said,

God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or he is able, and is unwilling; or he is neither willing nor able, or he is both willing and able. If he is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if he is able and unwilling, he is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if he is neither willing nor able, he is both

⁵⁷ Archbishop Boghos Levon Zekian, e-mail message to author, March 7, 2017.

envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does he not remove them?⁵⁸

Some twenty centuries later another philosopher, David Hume (1711–1776) observed “Epicurus’ old questions are not yet answered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”⁵⁹ As seen in the previous chapter, challenged by these and other questions all religions have reflected on, and relying on their Scriptures and their philosophical-theological traditions have tried to provide different answers and defenses. From a philosophical perspective, most of these theodicies are based on or at least start from Plato who considered God itself as goodness and justice. Plato, indeed, denied the assumption that God is the source of evil as well as of good: “He is responsible for a few things that happen to [humans], but for many he is not, for the good things we enjoy are much fewer than the evil. The former we must attribute to none else but God; but for the evil we must find some other causes, not God.”⁶⁰

One of the pioneers of Catholic theodicy is Augustine (A.D. 354 - 430) who probed deeply into the problem. The Christian response that he developed has proved so influential that “we may speak of the Augustinian type of solution.”⁶¹ The Augustinian approach, “representing until fairly recently the majority report of the Christian mind, hinges upon the idea of the fall, which has in turn brought about the disharmony of nature.”⁶² Focusing on Genesis, which essentially asserts that God created the world and that it was good, and by referring to the story of the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve disobeyed God and caused indwelling sin, the Augustinian

⁵⁸ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.

⁵⁹ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (New York, NY: Hafner, 1948), 66

⁶⁰ See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² William L. Rowe, ed., *God and the Problem of Evil* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 266.

approach argues that evil is merely a consequence of the fall of humans. It follows that evil is “nothing but the corruption of natural measure, form or order. What is called an evil nature is a corrupt nature. If it were not corrupt it would be good. But when it is corrupted, so far as it remains a natural thing, it is good. It is bad only so far as it is corrupted.”⁶³

Augustine stated that natural evil, that is, evil present in the natural world, such as natural disasters, etc., is caused by fallen angels, whereas moral evil, evil caused by the will of human beings, is the result of human beings who have gone away from God and they have chosen to deviate from their original location. Augustine argued that God could not have created evil in the world since it had been created good and that all notions of evil are simply a deviation or privation of goodness. In Augustinian theodicy, evil cannot be a separate and unique substance, for instance, blindness is not a separate entity, but it is just a lack or loss of vision. It follows that according to Augustine the problem of evil and suffering is void because God did not create evil, it was humans who chose to deviate from the path of perfect goodness.

Augustine’s theodicy was a milestone in the history of theodicy in general, and of reflections on the problem of evil in particular. His constant question, “What is evil?” and his attempted answers as “either evil coincides with non-being and therefore does not exist in itself,” or “evil is the fear of evil,” or “it has a different and opposite nature to that of the will, and therefore exists in itself” influenced, among others, also Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. Concerning the former, Aquinas devoted his opus the *Quaestio disputata de malo* to the topic of evil as sin. In Aquinas’ conception, evil is a privation, or in other words, the absence of some good which belongs properly to the nature of the creatures. Consequently, there is a positive source of evil, corresponding to the greater good, which is God. In Aquinas’ vision evil rather than being real is

⁶³ Augustine, *Earlier Writings*, trans. J.H.S. Burleigh (Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 327.

rational, meaning that it exists not as an objective fact, but as a subjective conception. In reality things are not really bad in themselves, but they are bad because of their relation to other things or people. All realities are good in themselves and they produce negative results only incidentally. Consequently, the ultimate cause of evil is fundamentally good, as well as the objects in which there is evil.⁶⁴

Most of Roman-Catholic writings on the problem of evil that have any kind of official or semi-official standing usually follow closely these Augustinian and Thomist teachings.⁶⁵ Many philosophical discussions of the problem of evil, in these recent years, indeed, have been dominated by the free-will defense which argues that the traditional Augustinian type of theodicy, based upon the fall from grace of free finite creatures and a consequent going wrong of the physical world, is not logically impossible. A significant effort has been made by Alvin Plantinga, the John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame, and a number of Christian philosophers "to show that a limitlessly powerful and limitlessly good God is responsible for the existence of this world. For all evil may ultimately be due to misuses of creaturely freedom."⁶⁶

1. John Hick and Irenaean Theodicy

However, without losing the forest for the trees, I would like to mention another point of view developed by John Hick (1922-2012), one of the most relevant philosophers of religion of the second half of the twentieth century. Even though he was not a Catholic, his faith journey brought him to interact with the Catholic faith, as he found out that "sincere adherents of other

⁶⁴ See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 93-98.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁶⁶ Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil*, 266.

faiths experience the Transcendent just as Christians do, though with variances due to cultural, historical, and doctrinal factors.”⁶⁷ I find his contribution to Christian theodicy relevant for my research for two reasons: (1) his Irenaean “soul-making” theodicy in which he argued that God allows evil and suffering in the world in order to develop humans into virtuous creatures capable of following his will, is also shared by one of the Muslim perspectives relating to suffering and disability, (2) this Irenaean approach is founded on a two-stage creative process which is related to being created in God’s image and likeness.

Hick takes his distance from an Augustinian and prefers the Irenaean approach to theodicy. Indeed, although Irenaeus did not fully establish a theodicy, he did build a framework of thought within which it was possible to offer an alternative approach to that of the Fall.⁶⁸ According to this Irenaean theodicy approach, indeed, human beings grow into a relationship with God from imperfection to perfection. This point of view is in contrast to the conviction that human beings fall away from original perfection.

He argues that the creation accounts contain deep spiritual truths about the existential relationship between the creator and creation. On the other hand, they do not contain literal truths about how the universe came to exist. Considering humanity as a very late product of the evolutionary process, Hick rejects any suggestion that natural evil could be a punishment for sin. According to Hick, “instead of the Augustinian view of life’s trials as a divine punishment for Adam’s sin, Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed

⁶⁷ David C. Cramer, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, s.v. “John Hick,” <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>.

⁶⁸ See Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil*, 267.

environment for man's [and woman's] development towards the perfection that represents the fulfilment of God's good purpose."⁶⁹

The Irenaean approach has a two-stage creative process whereby humans are created with the potential for knowledge of God and for a full relationship with God: "Irenaeus distinguishes between the image of God and the likeness of God in man [and woman]. The 'imago,' which resides in man's [and woman's] bodily form, apparently represents [their] nature as an intelligent creature capable of fellowship with [their] Maker, whilst the 'likeness' represents [their] final perfecting by the Holy Spirit."⁷⁰ It follows that creation is first in the image of God and then develops into the likeness of God. This two-stage process sees people as being created in the image of God but morally and spiritually immature and at the beginning of a long period of growth. The second stage of the creative process is the long period of growth and development necessary for people to grow into God's likeness. Perfection lies in the future rather than in the past. For Hick, the Fall refers to the gap between what we are and what God intends for us to be.

This extension toward eschaton is based on the conviction that God brings imperfect and immature humanity to itself in uncompelled faith and love using afflictions and suffering present in the world. Moral evil causes pain and suffering but there is also another source of pain and suffering in the structure of the world which causes a variety of evils, from earthquakes to floods, from cholera to meningitis, etc. Hick argues that "a great deal both of pain and suffering is humanly caused, not only by the inhumanity of man to man but also by the stresses of our individual and corporate life-styles, causing many disorders." However, the question is still relevant: "why an unlimitedly good and unlimitedly powerful God should have created so dangerous a world, both as regards its purely natural hazards of earthquake and flood, etc., and as

⁶⁹ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 215.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

regards the liability of the human body to so many ills, both psychosomatic and purely somatic?”⁷¹

Hick answers the question by arguing that a world without pain or suffering would prevent moral development; such a world would have no fixed structure, or have a structure subject to divine intervention, preventing humans from coming to any harm: “we can imagine a paradise in which no one can ever come to any harm. It could be a world which, instead of having its own fixed structure, would be plastic to human wishes.”⁷² Hick argued that this would leave humans unable to help or harm one another, allowing them no moral choices and so preventing moral development: “Whatever the values of such a world, it clearly could not serve a purpose of the development of its inhabitants from self-regarding animality to self-giving love.”⁷³

In a nutshell, Hicks’s Irenaean approach sees human beings with their real yet limited freedom as created for a relationship with God as well as destined ultimately to find the fulfillment of their nature in that relationship. It follows that the current human situation is enjoyable for it “gives meaning to our temporal existence as the long process through which we are being created, by our own free responses to life’s mixture of good and evil, into ‘children of God’ who ‘inherit eternal life.’”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil*, 273-274.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 275.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

2. Anti-Theodicy

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that, while many Christian philosophers and theologians have tried to justify the problem of evil, there has always been an anti-theodicy trend. This reached its climax especially in the period of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Thinkers like Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789), following Hume's and others' aforementioned doubts, tried to break with the influence of Augustinian and Thomistic perspectives.⁷⁵ Their points of view are important for this research as at the end of the day they reflect constant questions posed by people who face afflictions and disabilities in their lives today.

According to Nurten Kiriş, a professor of philosophy at Süleyman Demirel University in Turkey, first, these thinkers argued against Catholic dogma of original sin but then, by doing so they had to face again the problem of evil, its source and its reasons. Consequently, they focused on Leibniz (1646-1716) and tried to disprove his "best of all possible worlds" theory which consists in "the belief that a world without evil, preferable in order to ours, is not possible; otherwise it would have been preferred. It is necessary to believe that the mixture of evil has produced the greatest possible good: otherwise the evil would not have been permitted."⁷⁶ Schopenhauer (1788-1860) instead argues the contrary and maintains that this world is the worst of all possible worlds. According to him, the problem of evil cannot be resolved through theodicy as human beings face this issue everywhere and at all times. The efforts being made to explain the problem of evil with theodicy are not useful as they do not eliminate the issue. What

⁷⁵ Nurten Kiriş, "Tarihsel olarak kötülük problemi ve çözüm yolu olarak teodise," *FLSF* (Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü Dergisi), 5 (2008): 91-92.

⁷⁶ Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz, *The Shorter Leibniz Texts: A Collection of New Translations*, trans. Lloyd Strickland (New York, NY: Continuum, 2006), 208.

is worthy for Schopenhauer to overcome a painful human life is to learn how to deal with it and his way passes through “artistic, moral, and ascetic forms of awareness.”⁷⁷

These perspectives are significant because they represent a relevant passage from a speculative effort to deal with the problem of evil to reflections based on the personal struggles of those who face afflictions. A significant example of this perspective is the French philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960). Keep in mind that Camus and his family dealt with some disabilities. His mother indeed could hear only out of her left ear; his father was wounded in 1914 during World War I, and died from his wounds in a makeshift army hospital, while Camus himself contracted tuberculosis in 1930, and he had to end his football activities as a goalkeeper for a prominent Algerian university team.⁷⁸ Camus ties his rejection of God’s existence to the presence of evil which shows up in abundant and very violent forms, and defines this dilemma as an acute paradox:

in the presence of God there is less a problem of freedom than a problem of evil. You know the alternative: either we are not free and God the all-powerful is responsible for evil. Or we are free and responsible but God is not all powerful. All the scholastic subtleties have neither added anything to nor subtracted anything from the acuteness of this paradox.⁷⁹

Concerning the just-mentioned passage from a speculative effort to deal with the problem of evil to reflections based on personal struggles of those who face afflictions in their own skin, I would like to bring attention to a contemporary example of this kind. I believe indeed that the life experience of this amazing person of Catholic faith, as well as the way in which she

⁷⁷ Kiriş, “Tarihsel olarak kötülük problemi,” 93.

⁷⁸ See Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 28.

⁷⁹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1991), 56.

formulated her vision of evil, suffering, pain, sin, and disability, in a certain way are hidden among the lines of all the philosophical and theological treatises mentioned above.

3. Nancy Mairs: “I am crippled”

Nancy Mairs, who passed away very recently, on December 3, 2016, at age 73, was an author who wrote about spirituality, women’s issues, and her experiences living with multiple sclerosis (MS). Born in 1943 in Long Beach, California, she grew up in Boston, Massachusetts. She received an AB from Wheaton College, and an MFA in writing and a Ph.D. from the University of Arizona. I will place her life under a spotlight through the following titles: defining, dealing with, and believing.

Defining

Mairs was diagnosed with MS when she was 28, a diagnosis that changed completely her life and that of those around her. In her own words she explained her diagnosis as follows:

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic degenerative disease of the central nervous system, in which the myelin that sheathes the nerves is somehow eaten away and scar tissue forms in its place, interrupting the nerves’ signals. During its course, which is unpredictable and uncontrollable, one may lose vision, hearing, speech, the ability to walk, control of bladder and/or bowels, strength in any or all extremities, sensitivity to touch, vibration, and/or pain, potency, coordination of movements – the list of possibilities is lengthy and, yes, horrifying. One may also lose one’s sense of humor. That’s the easiest to lose and the hardest to survive without.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Nancy Mairs, *Plain Text* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 11.

It was not so easy to accept the diagnosis; and if she did, who can really know about it? However, she committed amazingly to deal with it, to live with it, with her ups and downs. The latter had reached even a suicidal attempt while the former brought her to experience a very deep faith journey which took her from the Congregationalist faith to the Roman Catholic Church. One of the ways to deal with MS was writing things down. She wrote “with all intellectual-emotional flags flying” a river of books on degeneration, pain, immobility, fury, self-loathing, embarrassment; on accommodation, humor, hope, empathy, self-discovery, and self-dignity.⁸¹ “As always, I write from the particular perspective my circumstances dictate: as a cripple, a Catholic grounded in liberation theology, a daughter, wife, sister, and mother, a depressive, a feminist.”⁸²

One of her first reactions to MS was about defining “disability.” She refused to participate in the degeneration of the language to the extent that she denied that she had lost anything in the course of her calamitous disease, as she defined it: “I refuse to pretend that the only differences between you and me are the various ordinary ones that distinguish any one person from another.”⁸³ As Art Seidenbaum, *Los Angeles Times*’ opinion editor, pointed out, “on one page, Mairs is her own object of derision; on the next, she is her own subject of determination. With hardly any space for self-pity, she comes to realize that she has a disease but is not defined by it.”⁸⁴

Actually, even when she defined herself “a cripple,” it was just the title of a flag-raising poem going on with fierce statements of a wonderful woman: I am... I choose... I refuse... I

⁸¹ See Art Seidenbaum, “Plain Text by Nancy Mairs,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1986, http://articles.latimes.com/1986-03-30/books/bk-1505_1_nancy-mairs.

⁸² Nancy Mairs, *A Troubled Guest: Life and Death Stories* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 13.

⁸³ Mairs, *Plain Text*, 10.

⁸⁴ Seidenbaum, “Plain Text by Nancy Mairs.”

want...: “I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are ‘handicapped’ and ‘disabled’.... People – crippled or not – wince at the word ‘cripple,’ as they do not at ‘handicapped’ or ‘disabled.’” She did not know why she made this choice. But she recognized that her motives were certainly complex and not entirely flattering: “Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger.”⁸⁵

She refused the word “disabled” as she lost the full use of her limbs, and “disabled,” by contrast, suggests any incapacity, physical or mental. She refused also the word “handicapped,” as this implies that she had deliberately been put at a disadvantage, by whom she cannot imagine, in order to equalize chances in the great race of life. Her God is not a “Handicapper General,” therefore these words seem to her to be moving her from her condition, in her own words, “to be widening the gap between word and reality.”⁸⁶

Dealing with

She was not a conventional theologian, she did not write treaties on the problem of evil and suffering; she just lived it, experienced it, and expressed it in her ways. She did not connect her disability with evil:

Over the years I have come to expect – even accept – attacks of violent self-loathing. Luckily, in general our society no longer connects deformity and disease directly with evil (though a charismatic once told me that I have MS because a devil is in me) and so I’m allowed to move largely at will, even among small children. But I’m not sure that this

⁸⁵ Mairs, *Plain Text*, 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

revision of attitude has been particularly helpful. Physical imperfection, even freed of moral disapprobation, still defies and violates the ideal, especially for women, whose confinement in their bodies as objects of desire is far from over.⁸⁷

According to Mairs, what makes us human is precisely the illusion of divergence between material and spiritual being. She writes,

My 'I' feels trapped in a structure that I once imagined fondly as a house but that has metamorphosed under the baneful influence of MS into a prison. The inmate is intact, although, because weakness renders speech and writing increasingly difficult, she must struggle to communicate the fact to the outside world. Immurement feels like a distinct and horrific possibility.⁸⁸

According to Mairs, focusing on suffering is a pitfall when facing a disability even, in a way, to come to live for it.⁸⁹ Another pitfall is, instead, denying one's difficulties as this denial can have nasty bodily consequences for those who live with physical disabilities:

Each time I've taken a bad fall, I've been ignoring the limitations fatigue and muscular weakness place on my body. I've been treating my body as though it were some other body, an able body. But it's not. It's mine. A body in trouble. And it's my responsibility to attend to its realities and take proper care of it. I can't do that if I deny that it needs special treatment.⁹⁰

Another important point to deal with this kind of situation is being grateful, rather than choosing to view life as "the saddest story ever told and yourself – whether you have MS or love

⁸⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁸ Nancy Mairs, *A Dynamic God: Living an Unconventional Catholic Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 39.

⁸⁹ Cf. Nancy Mairs, *Carnal Acts: Essays* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1990), 113.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 112.

someone who has MS – as a tragic figure in its center. You really may. You’re in absolute charge here.”⁹¹ She, instead, chose to be grateful; the gratefulness was, in her own words, the most valuable response she had developed: “I don’t mean that I’m grateful for having MS. I’m not, not in the least, and I don’t see why I should be. What I’m grateful for is that, in spite of having MS, I’ve fulfilled ambitions I never dreamed I would.”⁹² She, in effect, saw her children grow up, a foster son in the navy, a daughter in the Peace Corps, and a son in college. She was afraid her husband would have left her, they celebrated many wedding anniversaries. She graduated twice, she became a writer.

These positive thoughts alternated with desperations, she even considered and attempted an “abortive suicide.” She explained motivations which pushed her: “I think, but because when depression is deepest, one loses all sense of human attachment. Suicide is then an unwilled but utter failure of love, its consequences invariably cruel.”⁹³ The questions she was asking may be all common to other people who face disabilities and diseases:

As I slouch here in my wheelchair, gasping with the terror of being buried alive, questions batter my brain. Who in the world benefits from my idleness, no matter how reluctant? Why am I still here? What on earth am I for? Beyond giving others the opportunity to practice the works of mercy at my expense, can I be said to serve any function at all? And if not, am I still fully human?⁹⁴

Beneath her interest in death, as in disability before it, she identified her desire to understand the role of affliction in perfecting human experience. From a spiritual perspective she saw

⁹¹ Ibid., 124.

⁹² Ibid., 115.

⁹³ Mairs, *A Troubled Guest*, 140-141.

⁹⁴ Mairs, *A Dynamic God*, 39.

suffering as an element in the human condition, to be neither courted nor combatted. She refused to consider it scandalous, a mark of illness to be cured or moral deviance to be corrected. According to Mairs, to refuse to suffer was to refuse fully to live with the consequence of risky behaviors such as self-mutilation, anorexia nervosa, and addiction all stemming from an inauthentic relation to suffering, or as she defined it, “an anesthesia of the soul which renders play all but impossible.”⁹⁵

Believing

Although not always linear, she had a strong faith, a firm faith in God. When she talked about her conversion to the Catholic faith, she used the Greek word *metanoia*:

What I have undergone is what theologians call ‘metanoia,’ which I had always thought of, insofar as I thought of it at all, as a synonym for the sort of once-for-all conversion I had made in 1977 when I became a Roman Catholic. Metanoia, a Greek word meaning a change of mind, seemed straightforward enough. I knew that for some Christians metanoia signified repentance, which I did constantly, and acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s personal savior, which I had never done. Beyond that, the word was Greek to me. I never imagined myself to be suffering ‘a sea-change / Into something rich and strange.’ All right, strange maybe. But I wasn’t aware of the ongoing radical revision and transformation that placed the Holy at the center of my being.⁹⁶

“The Holy” was her force, an “incarnate” and “crucified” Holy. One of the reasons for which she joined the CC was indeed the emphasis on incarnation given by the CC: “a God who put on a body and walked about in that body and spoke to us from that body and died as that body and yet

⁹⁵ Mairs, *A Troubled Guest*, 1-2.

⁹⁶ Mairs, *A Dynamic God*, xii.

somehow did not die then or ever but lives on in our bodies which live in God. It's not the easiest story in the world to swallow."⁹⁷ The cross, for her, signified God in the world, in other words, God willing to take on human form and experience the full range of humanness, even death, in order to make clear to us our participation in divinity.⁹⁸ This is why she never considered suffering an aberration or an outrage to be eliminated at any cost: "In my experience a certain amount of suffering attends disability regardless of how well it is accommodated.... It strikes me as an element intrinsic to the human condition. I don't like it. I'm not asked to like it. I must simply endure in order to learn from it."⁹⁹

Mairs also considered suffering as a way for God to enter the world: "We are not pitiful creatures huddled helplessly beneath a blizzard of miseries blown down by some capricious power amusing himself at our expense. God is with(in) each of us, and to the extent that we recognize and honor God's presence in one another, we form and dwell in the Community of God."¹⁰⁰ Because of her belief in this incarnated and crucified God, she was not afraid of her sins. The effect of sin for her was to create a chasm between the self and God-as-parent, as she used to describe, so wide and black that we forget that God waits for us, sorrowfully but with infinite patience, on the other side: "God is not harmed by our sin – God cannot be harmed – but grieves over the harm we do ourselves and one another."¹⁰¹ So she kept communicating, because the nourishing quality of the Eucharist, freely offered to anyone who's famished, was a central metaphor for her. "I don't partake because I'm a good Catholic, holy and pious and sleek. I partake because I'm a bad Catholic, riddled by doubt and anxiety and anger: fainting from severe

⁹⁷ Nancy Mairs, *Ordinary Time: Cycles in Marriage, Faith, and Renewal* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 3.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁹⁹ Mairs, *A Troubled Guest*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ Mairs, *Ordinary Time*, 186-187.

¹⁰¹ Mairs, *A Dynamic God*, 79.

hypoglycemia of the soul. I need food. ‘O Holy One, I pray as I savor the host, as this bread nourishes my body, so may your spirit nourish my soul. Grow strong within me, I pray, and let me live my life in your praise.’”¹⁰² Her deep relationship with God was expressed in conversations of every kind with God: “Sometimes, when I’m very angry ... ‘I’m your creature, God. You’re supposed to love me. WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME?’”¹⁰³

In all this growing up in faith and in relationship with God she never gave any space to a kind of spirituality which considers afflictions as given by God as a test of faith: “I just hate it when people say to me, ‘God never sends us more than we can handle.’ What kind of God would send us sickness and pain? What kind, indeed? And who could stay spiritually sane in relationship with a being of whose missives and projectiles one lived in dread?”¹⁰⁴ Instead, she chose to “practice the kingdom” while she was on earth, and every person she encountered, PWD or “nondisabled” ones, she encouraged them: “Don’t wait! Wake up! Listen! The more often you practice the kingdom, the more aware you become that the Holy is present. In pain. In sorrow. In terror. In delight. Even though you will die, and I will die, and one day, even if we don’t destroy it, the earth itself will die, the Holy endures, unfolding, always and everywhere.”¹⁰⁵

In this chapter I reflected on disability from the perspective of the CC, and our focus has been the context of Turkey. On the model of the previous chapter, after giving necessary information about the foundations and structure of CC, first I went through the Old and the New Testaments, whence I extracted terms related to different kinds of disabilities and verses putting at the center people with different disabilities. Then I moved the lens to major sources of Catholic teaching and instruction such as the Code of Canon Law, the CSD, the CCC, and I gave

¹⁰² Mairs, *Ordinary Time*, 89.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 184.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Mairs, *A Dynamic God*, 133.

particular attention to five preparatory documents of the Jubilee Day of the Community with Persons with Disabilities held in 2000. After analyzing the current efforts of the CC in Turkey toward PWD I finally focused on disability from the perspective of the problem of evil and suffering. The first part of this investigation examined the historical development of theological understanding of the problem of evil, where mentioned were some major names of both theodicy as well as anti-theodicy. I wanted to conclude by, presenting a contemporary Catholic woman, Nancy Mairs, who in my thought, through her life and the way of dealing, incarnated very deeply all the facets of disability-related issues and questions. The findings of this chapter along with the previous one on some Muslim perspectives on disability, will be placed in comparison, discussed and commented on broadly in the following one.

V. A PROPOSAL FOR DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION

After having explored in detail Muslim and Catholic perspectives on disability and PWD, and looked at disability from their theodicy angles, in this final chapter I will discuss some relevant commonalities and differences which came up. Following this, I will present some topics related to disability and PWD for eventual dialogue between Muslims and Christians in the context of Turkey.

A) Discussion: Commonalities and Differences

In order to find the Muslim perspective on disability I examined closely the primary sources of Islamic teaching, namely the Quran, the *Sunna*, and the Islamic law. In these sources, I could not find a single general term that would include all PWD as a group. Doing research on these Islamic sources, however, utilizing some words conventionally associated with disability such as *blind*, *deaf*, *lame*, *mute*, *weak*, I obtained different results.¹ I found that most of the time these words are used in the Quran metaphorically, signifying people's deafness to the law of God or blindness to the true path. In some other instances, they are not metaphorical. Furthermore, we found many provisions for exempting blind, lame, or sick people from warfare, protecting the weak-minded person from financial exploitation, and reassuring the faithful that disabled people

¹ Cf. Maysaa S. Bazna and Tarek A. Hatab, "Disability in the Quran: The Islamic Alternative to Defining, Viewing, and Relating to Disability," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 9/1 (2005): 10; see also Emine Gül, *Kuran'ın engellilere yaklaşımı. Kuran'da engelliler* (Istanbul: Akis Kitap, 2005), 41-42.

may eat in their houses. Concerning the Bible, I could not find either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament any single generic term that would include all PWD as a group. Nonetheless, research on biblical vocabulary utilizing terms such as *blind*, *deaf*, *lame*, *mute*, *weak* gave us different results, and we found that the most common disabilities mentioned are blindness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy, and paralysis.

Before examining verses related to PWD and different disabilities I studied “humankind” both in the Quran and in the Bible. I have seen that in Islam, a person’s worth is based not on any physical or material characteristics but on piety,² which concerns primarily an authentic commitment to the five pillars of Islam. Therefore, the concepts of perfection and imperfection in the physical sense, as well as by extension the concepts of normalcy and abnormalcy have little application in the Islamic view of human life.³ It follows that in Islam for a person to be worthy, a deep consciousness of God is more important than his or her physical perfection. Concerning the CC teaching, on the other hand, humankind is the greatest of God’s creatures, created in the image and likeness of God and crowned by God with love, so their value surpasses that of any other created reality because the fact that each human being is unique and unrepeatable, guarantees his original dignity.⁴ While in the CC teaching the dignity of humankind surpasses any other created reality, in Islam, instead, humankind does not have an absolute superiority. In other words, while God created humankind in the most beautiful stature, he did not render man and woman superior to all. There are other creatures which are superior in

² See Rooshey Hasnain, Laura Cohon Shaikh, and Hasnan Shanawani, *Disability and the Muslim Perspective: An Introduction for Rehabilitation and Health Care Providers* (Buffalo, NY: CIRRIE, 2008), 27.

³ Bazna and Hatab, “Disability in the Quran,” 12.

⁴ Cf. Committee for the Jubilee Day of the Community with Persons with Disabilities, “Preparation for The Jubilee Day. Committee Part I. The Person with Disabilities: The Image of God and a Place of his Wonders,” www.vatican.va.

every aspect to human beings that carry each one of the characteristics that a human being possesses in a far more perfect way than a human. According to the Quran, what makes a difference, instead, are man's and woman's creation and their ability to produce knowledge.

In Islam, from the fact that the original nature of humans is essentially good and people are born pure and potentially perfect,⁵ humankind is considered the worthiest creature, favored above many that God has created (cf. Quran 17:70), and finally placed as a "vicegerent upon the earth" (2:30). It follows that, for Islam, anyone with the potential to be a human being shares this status and favored position in terms of human beings, regardless of color, race, language, poverty, or richness, or whether they are able-bodied, able-minded, or disabled. In the eyes of the Quran, people are different only in their beliefs and deeds, even though they are equal in terms of rights (6:132), while their race, skin color, sex, and the languages they speak, as well as their being able-bodied, able-minded, or disabled do not make them more or less superior to each other (49:13). Furthermore, in Islamic understanding, while God creates human beings in a perfect way, God then forms them in wombs however he will (3:6). Consequently, among them are also blind, lame, and sick persons (24:61; 48:17), as well as those who are "feeble-minded" (4:5) and "dumb" (2:18). The Quran and hadiths have revealed that it is necessary for those who have resources to take care of the weak, to help them to develop themselves.

Concerning the CC teaching, on the other hand, I found that the creation of the first man and woman in God's image and likeness remains the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology.⁶ In the first place, humankind represents God by human stature, upright posture, and they receive

⁵ Cf. Bazna and Hatab, "Disability in the Quran," 11.

⁶ Cf. Pia Matthews, *Pope John Paul II and the Apparently 'Non-acting' Person* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2013), 61.

from God a real function, a delegation to dominate even the beasts,⁷ that is, evil. These two complementary characteristics together render properly the idea of human value and dignity. Alongside such greatness, glory, and honor, however, humans also experience pain, sickness, and limitation. One of these limitations is mental or physical disability or a combination of both.

Trying to reconcile man's and woman's being created in God's image and likeness on one hand, and their limitations on the other, the Christian tradition taught that through the Incarnation the solidarity of Christ with humanity sharpens.⁸ Therefore being made in God's image corresponds to participation in the incorruptibility of God, and is equivalent to participation in Christ who is *imago Dei par excellence* (See Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4).⁹ As a result of being the new Adam, the perfect *imago Dei*, Christ has also the mission to transform Christians into images of the same God by virtue of their baptisms. It follows that the suffering and death of Christ on the cross followed by his glorious resurrection is the basis through which the teaching of the CC interprets issues related to the human body, diseases, and disabilities. The suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, is offered as a help for people who deal with different kinds of misfortunes, diseases, and disabilities to be patient as well as hope for the Hereafter.

II

Going through the Quran and the Bible regarding PWD and different disabilities produced the following results. The Quran mentions visual, hearing, speech, orthopedic, and mental disabilities and diseases. While the vast majority of the verses related to these are in the

⁷ See Albert Gelin, S.S., *The Concept of Man in the Bible* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 29-31.

⁸ See Matthews, *Pope John Paul II and the Apparently 'Non-acting' Person*, 61.

⁹ See Gelin, *The Concept of Man*, 37-38.

figurative sense, in physical terms, the number of verses related to disability and illness is quite limited. According to the Quran, God created the heart, eyes, ears, and tongue not only to make people understand, see, hear, and speak about physical goods but also about the truth (16:78). Furthermore, the Quran talks about disabilities related to sight, hearing, and speech not only concerning this world but also concerning the Hereafter.

When blindness is mentioned in the Quran in the sense of the loss of eyesight, it assumes primarily the following meanings or uses: (1) it may signify that God considers believers according to their tendency toward God, God's prophecy, and according to their faith and obedience, but not according to their disability or health in respect to the physical structures; (2) it may be used as an analogy; (3) it may announce some facilitations to the believers with disabilities in complying with their religious duties; (4) and finally it may refer to the prophet Jesus' healing blind people with God's permission. I found that Islam holds people responsible only for their strengths (cf. 2:286; 2:185). "There is no fault against the blind" (24:61; 48:17), confirms God's care for PWD's and the importance of PWD in the eyes of God but also says that regarding their religious duties, blind people are responsible within their capability. I also found that in some instances God rebuked Muhammad for his not-so-welcoming attitude toward a blind man and to honor the latter despite his blindness. This revelation alone would confirm that in Islam the real merit of people lies in the degree to which they seek the truth rather than their physical appearances.

Apropos of blindness and similar disabilities in some passages of the Bible these disabilities are caused by old age as in the case of Isaac (Gn 27:1), Jacob (Gn 48:10), and Eli (1 Sm 3:2 and 4:15). Then another reason for disabilities, we found through our investigation in the Bible, is God in person. Indeed, in the Old Testament there is a clear connection between sin and

disability, followed by a punishment; generally, in the Old Testament the disability is given by God as punishment for transgressions, a curse as a consequence of disobedience. Apropos of blindness, for instance, several narratives support the finding that visual impairment is viewed as a symbol of ignorance, sin, and unbelief, sometimes to describe those who dwell in the darkness of prison or captivity (Is 42:7, 16-19; 43:8; 49:9; Ps 146:7-8), sometimes to indicate the lack of intellectual or moral understanding (Is 29:9-10, 18). In the same way, hearing impairments symbolize spiritual stubbornness or deliberate refusal to hear and obey the word of God (Jer 5:21; Ez 12:2; Is 42:18-20; 43:8; Zec 7:11-14; Dt 4:28; Ps 115:4-8; Rv 9:20). Finally, in some cases, such as Deuteronomy 15:20-22, disabilities of animals are referred to in terms of their defect being an impediment to being sacrificed to the Lord.

I encountered the same attitude, with maybe some different nuances, also in the Quran. In the case of physical blindness, for instance, some verses are used by way of similitude in order to emphasize the difference between those who disbelieve and rebel against God and those who believe and do righteous deeds (cf. 11:24; 13:16; 13:19; 40:58). Moreover, in some places the Quran mentions idols such as a dumb creature with power over naught, who is nothing but a burden unto his master for idols are unable to speak. I think that the use of the word “dumb” as a physical impairment aims certainly toward a moral outcome. However, the related verses, where blind, deaf, and mute are in question in the physical sense, are not to be understood as humiliating or vilifying but are just determining a situation, and so the text is using similitude like a literary genre.

When it is used in the spiritual sense, instead, blindness indicates blindness of heart which becomes unable to see the truth (22:46). The blindness of heart is alluded to throughout the Quran, in addition to deafness and muteness. The Quran sees the heart as the seat of knowledge

and the organ of spiritual understanding (among others see especially 2:18; 5:71; 41:17). In most of these verses regarding spiritual insensitivity to God's messengers, the Quran frequently refers to blindness and deafness. According to the Quran, in fact, there can be both a pre-existing moral blindness and deafness that impedes an individual's ability to be spiritually convinced and moved by God's messages and this attitude then leads to a state of blindness. The considerations on blindness are valid also for deafness. Deafness is mentioned in both the physical and spiritual senses because those who have no physical hearing issue yet close their ears to God's and Muhammad's calls are called deaf (cf. 41:44; 47:23; 2:7; 16:108; 27:80). I also found several instances in which these disabilities refer to infidels, polytheists, and hypocritical people.

Additionally, the Quran in different places refers to blindness, deafness, and muteness in the Hereafter. The common interpretation of this fact is that those who used their organs, for instance their eyes, against the aims of creation consequently merit a miserable life and so they will be brought physically blind on the Last Day. People with some orthopedic disabilities, mentioned by the Quran under the word "lame," are mentioned along with "blind" and "sick" (cf. 24:61; 48:17) and in terms of religious duties and some amenities provided in situations of war or pilgrimages because of some physical impairment.

Interpretations made toward people with some mental disabilities mentioned in the Quran, as "feeble-minded," are numerous and have different nuances. For example, mental disability is expressed in both true and figurative senses since it sometimes refers to defamations made against the messengers of God (cf. 15:6; 44:14; 68:51), and sometimes to those who need to be protected as they cannot make proper decisions in civil and business relationships (2:282; 4:5). In some instances, moreover, it may also refer to women and minors, who should not be entrusted with property, lest they lose or corrupt it, or (as is suggested by some others) it may

refer only to those whose mental condition requires their confinement. In the figurative sense, as in the case of blind and deaf people, it refers to those infidel, polytheist, and hypocritical people, who cannot use their mind to understand the truth that was announced.

Relevant for Muslim-Christian dialogue are those narratives in the Quran which refer to the prophet Jesus' healings where he heals a man born blind and a leper (5:110; 3:49), since they show commonalities with Jesus' healings in the Gospel. Also the miracle narrated of the prophet Jacob and his son Joseph can be read through this perspective (12:84; 12:93.96). These miracles in the Quran, administered by God's "leave" (39:62), show that disabilities are considered a disease and, as is seen in some cases, they can be healed. Underlining God's "leave" is necessary because for Islam Jesus is the son of Mary but not the son of God. It follows that these miracles are attributed to him as a prophet and so realized by him only with leave of God.

When we as Christians read Jesus' healing encounters narrated in the New Testament our perspective is quite different, because for Christians Jesus is the son of God. Jesus met a large number of people marked by the limits and the evil that destroy body, spirit, and mind, and treated them, healed them, gave them the joy of life and relationships with people, and we think, all this is connected with the mystery of the omnipotent God who chose also fragility and weakness with the incarnation. Passing through narratives about Jesus' encounters with PWD and his healings, for Jesus any illness or human frailty does not deny the person their dignity, the ability to live one's life in relationship with God and with others, the ability to look with hope to their future.

Matthew 25:31-46 shows the expected attitude or unappreciated behavior toward sick people and PWD; it follows that the presence of these people in society is a test of faith. The Good Samaritan narrated in Luke 10:25-37 shows that now there is a new era in which all outcasts are

welcome. The parable of the Great Banquet narrated in Luke 14:15–24, where “the crippled, the blind and the lame” are expressly mentioned, reminds us that Jesus radically challenged the *status quo*: the poor, the crippled, the blind—the so-called least of society—are among us, are us. People healed by Jesus were also forgiven, and saved. The fact that these encounters and healings continued also after Jesus’ departure and thus were not limited to Jesus’ time and presence, is a further encouragement and a push for followers of Jesus, the Church, in the acceptance of PWD.

Talking about Jesus’ attitudes toward PWD a comparison attempt with Muhammad’s attitudes comes up naturally. Studying closely, I found also that Muhammad related to PWD, was interested in them, valued them, solved their problems, and consoled them when necessary. Therefore, there are several authentic traditions from the Hadith concerning those with disabilities or disabling illnesses, as well as their possible treatment or recommended behavior.¹⁰ Muhammad underlined the importance of life and health, and encouraged believers to ask God for forgiveness and health. His openness to a person with some orthopedic handicap, who was allowed by Muhammad to join the war and was martyred on the battlefield, can be seen as an encouragement to maintain the same attitude toward PWD.

Also the happiness of this person at the moment in which Muhammad allowed him and promised him the Hereafter, confirms the fact that the promise for a whole and healthy existence in the Hereafter may help believers with disabilities in their earthly lives. Also the fact that he employed some PWD, allowed some of them to be his deputies, exercising the role of imam, participating in war and in mandatory prayers, is at the foundation of various provisions in Islam related to PWD. All these attitudes demonstrate Islam’s respect for their employability and

¹⁰ See M. Miles, “Some Historical Texts on Disability in the Classical Muslim World,” *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 6/2-3 (2002): 81.

capabilities. Muhammad, indeed, is said to have tried to build a society in which believers respect each other regardless of their abilities. He considered the believers to be a united body in loving each other and having mercy, and when any limb is disturbed, the other limbs become disturbed and suffer for it. I find these considerations very close to Jesus's attitudes and Christian teaching's perspective of the Church as a united body.

Muhammad also gave great importance to the education of PWD as well as others without any disability. The fact that Muhammad privileged profession of faith in one God and behaving in ordinary life according to the faith professed, and invited those who have no disability to observe and to think about the situation of their disabled fellows and find out how to help them, all these attitudes and recommendations are close ties with the teaching of Jesus (cf. aforementioned parable narrated in Matthew 25:31-46).

In a nutshell, through this research I found that according to the Quran, the main reasons for disability are: (1) neglect and flaws of people, (2) divine will, (3) a test of faith. Every misfortune, therefore also disabilities of all kinds, happens with God's permission (64:11), and God permits misfortunes as a test of faith (21:35; 2:155-156). Although God commands men and women to protect their lives and belongings, to avoid dangers, to be careful in their actions, they can face misfortunes as everything is already written in a book (57:22). However, this should not lead Muslim believers to a fatalistic attitude but rather to act responsibly and to abstain from a total dismissal of God.

For the Bible, instead, in the Old Testament there is a very clear conflation between sin and disability, meaning that disability indicates punishment for wrongdoing and damages the divine image in humankind. And some echoes of this perspective are also shown in the New Testament in the mentality of people singled out in the question posed by Jesus' disciples in John 9:3 (the

story of the man born blind): “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” As in the Quran, so also in Jesus’ answer there is the same conclusion: “Neither he nor his parents sinned.” Therefore, Jesus rejects categorically this position; disability is not a punishment for sins or for any other motive, it is not a punishment “given” by God at all. It can be considered as a test of faith for those who are non-disabled. As mentioned before, indeed, some scholars perceive it as “segregationist charity,”¹¹ that is marginalized persons, including PWD are charity cases. Based on this research disability can be considered a challenge to faith also by PWD but absolutely not as a test “given” by God on purpose. In other words, a person with some disability may want to and can transform his or her situation into a faith journey through which to offer to God exclusions and injustices occasioned by encounters with society (cf. Eiesland’s “virtuous suffering”) and to sublimate his or her own sufferance through the sufferance of Jesus for one’s development toward the perfection that represents the fulfilment of God’s good purpose (as was suggested by Irenaeus’ approach of theodicy).

III

Regarding sources other than the Quran and the Bible, this research led us to highlight the following points. Islam defines itself as a religion which makes easy the life of Muslims (2:185; 22:78; 6:6). Thus through my research I found numerous modifications for PWD in the major sources or developed subsequently from them. These facilitations cover a broad range, from fasting during the month of Ramadan to ritual prayers. The foundation of all these is the fact that Islam does not stress the power of the person, and the principle of convenience comes into play

¹¹ See Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 70-75.

in every difficulty encountered. The loss of power caused by disabilities was taken into consideration in the obligations of PWD and, parallel to this, many facilitations were provided.

In this sense, studying the topic from a legal capacity perspective, and giving particular attention to two important issues closely related to one's legal capacity, namely, marriage of PWD and abortion, my research confirmed what Rispler-Chaim pointed out previously, that disability seen primarily as a medical problem, may turn easily into a social problem, especially when the handicap is noticeable or when it disturbs the functioning of the individual within society.¹² In marriage, because of numerous ethical, moral, and social implications, the existence of a handicap cannot be ignored. I also found that the human body exercises a crucial impact on various aspects of marriage¹³ such that the couple are both healthy enough to be able to engage in physical and emotional intimacy as well as in sexual intercourse, appears more central than bearing a child. Even though their bodies are healthy, if both parties have mental disability they cannot be married. However, if only one of them has some mental disabilities, this one can be married through his or her tutor or legal guardians.

Currently, the TCC sets out that "mentally ill" persons cannot marry unless it is certified by an official medical board report that there is no medical obstacle to that person's marriage (cf. art. 133). Art. 145 mentions the conditions when a marriage is null and void. The instances where one of the spouses has "inability of judgment" due to an ongoing situation or has a "mental illness which is severe and thus disables the person from marriage" are among the circumstances which make a marriage null and void. With regard to those under guardianship, the validity of a marriage is open to scrutiny if the guardian raises the issue in court that the

¹² Vardit Rispler-Chaim, "Islamic Law of Marriage and Divorce and Disabled Person: The Case of the Epileptic Wife," *Die Welt des Islams* 36/1 (1996): 90.

¹³ See Vardit Rispler-Chaim, *Disability in Islamic Law* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2007), 47-48.

minor and/or the adult under legal guardianship married without the consent of her or his guardian. We think that one of the major concerns of Islamic law regarding marriage in general and of PWD in particular is over ability to perform sexual intercourse, and this concern finds its echoes also in civil law. The sexual needs of a person are certainly to be respected and taken into account regardless of disability of a person. However, in order to avoid some eventual situations of abuse I also think that the degree of disability in question as well as the qualities and competences of those who are part of official medical board or of legal guardianship are very important.

Regarding the CC, I found that two characteristics, namely “understanding” and “capacity,” are required for marriage. Contrary to Islamic law, in the CC consent of the parties has a more decisive role, is the one that contains its real causal efficacy, and most importantly no human power is able to supply this consent (c. 1057 §1). The fact that from a sacramental perspective it is the bride and bridegroom who perform the marriage, the question of having no obstacle to marriage and choosing freely to wed each other assume a significant importance. In this sense I find the CC perspective more protective toward men and women with some mental disabilities. Islam, instead, in the first place, tends to protect and to privilege the nondisabled partner.

Regarding some impediments to the priesthood listed by Canon Law (c. 1041), if those regulations are read without making dutiful distinctions and ignoring the substantial differences between the structure of Catholic clergy and imams, Muhammad’s employment of some physically disabled companions in the exercise of ritual prayers can be seen as an outstanding opening of Islam with respect to the CC. However, making the dutiful distinctions the CC’s rules should not be considered designed to exclude anyone, but as simply established to say what are

the necessary conditions. In this sense the prudent judgment of bishops or of the competent major superiors called by the Code of Canon Law into examination assumes importance.

IV

Regarding the problem of evil and disability, I studied some major approaches in both Catholic thinking and Islamic thinking. My research led me to appreciate the efforts of both religions to understand, to rationalize, and most importantly to reconcile the ontology of evil and the inherent goodness of the world. However, affirming that the problem is already resolved seems quite overstated. That being said, apropos of CC teaching I found relevant the Augustinian and Irenaean approaches and reflections around them. The Augustinian approach in a certain way tries to relieve God from responsibility for evil putting the responsibility on humankind who improperly use their freedom. Whereas the Irenaean approach admits God's responsibility, yet tries to explain the reasons for which God created a world with the presence of evil. Another significant point in terms of relationship between God and human beings consists in this: that, while according to the Irenaean approach men and women are created for a relationship with their creator, according to the Augustinian approach the relationship between God and humankind is not so personal. The Augustinian approach, in order to explain the presence of evil on the earth, makes connections with the fall of angels and humankind. The Irenaean one, without refusing the impact of the fall, considers the earth as a place in which man and woman perfect themselves and so the outcomes of this earthly journey have eschatological terms.

Concerning the Islamic perspectives, in very general terms they see two different ways to explain the problem of evil. Those who chose the short way starting from a conviction about the

existence of an omnipotent and omniscient God, state that God can neither persecute nor be persecuted. It follows that if evil exists there should be a reason, although it cannot be explained because of the limitness of humankind. While others who chose the second way see the earth as the creation of a beautiful God, therefore everything there, because it reflects God's beauty, is beautiful. Consequently, they focus on the benefits of evil. Focusing on one of the major Islamic approaches coming from Turkey, I presented Yaran's Quranic theodicy according to which the Quran is not merely interested in theodicy, but in human attitudes or responses to God's acts in nature and history. The Quran also is not interested in logic and justification, but it most importantly relies on the dynamic relationship between human beings and God, and this is why there would not be a single answer for the problem of evil and suffering in human society.¹⁴ According to this approach the answers given by the Quran to the question concern mainly a test of faith and education of the believer, the misuse of human will, discipline and punishment, and finally the Hereafter as the home of justice.

Finally, the commonality of Islamic theodicy perspectives is their acceptance of the provenance of evil and good, namely God, which is the first and the final reason for their existence. The divergence consists in how these approaches explain it. For Islamic theodicies the resolution of the problem is not human beings but God. Who is the final source of evil? Can God make evil? If so does God make evil? In all approaches the attempted responses turn around these questions. Apparently, all approaches start from conviction about the existence of God. It follows that whatever exists in this world is not meaningless or unnecessary. For them some dose of evil is necessary, and many things which seem evil, in reality contribute to the life-cycle of

¹⁴ Cafer Sadık Yaran, *Kötülük ve theodise: Batı ve İslam din felsefesinde "kötülük problemi" ve teistik çözümler* (Ankara, Vadi Yayınları, 1997), 113; see also Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "The Problem of Suffering in Islam," *Journal of Dharma* 2 (1977): 276.

human beings, animals, and vegetables. They all recognize the limitness of human knowledge and therefore the mystery of evil is a normal consequence. Finally, all of them recognize that this world is not the final instance; there is the Hereafter where divine justice will certainly be accomplished.

Comparing these Christian and Muslim perspectives, the first significant finding is a divergence; while Islamic theodicies find the solution of the problem in God, one of the major Christian theodicy approaches, the Augustinian, tries to shift the responsibility to humankind for their misuse of their freedom which resulted in their fall. However, the Irenaean approach follows an approach closer to Islamic theodicies because it finds the source of evil within God's wisdom. It points to the close relationship between God and humankind, and its focus is more eschatological than centered on the past signified by the fall of humankind.

In the final analysis, although a commonly accepted solution of the problem seems a distant goal, in my opinion a certain methodology can contribute productively to both Christian and Muslim theological thinking. This methodology may consist in looking at the universe from a global perspective rather than examining the singular cases, afflictions, misfortunes. In other words, believer or not, for all affliction is affliction; an earthquake is *prima facie* an evil and the fact that a person loses his or her legs during an earthquake is an evil for all. But starting from one affliction to judge all the universe as evil is not helpful. In order to reach a comprehensive judgment regarding the whole universe one needs to apply a more global perspective. Therefore, theological reflections on the problem of evil need to follow a methodology of this kind which may start questioning the reasons for the evil and then may continue investigating the teleological outcomes, in other words, the purposes they serve. Situating the source of evil in the wisdom of God can lead to significant approaches. This research showed us that both Christian and Islamic

theodicy perspectives hold that if evil exists in a world created by a good God, it is for a major good, because it is “transitorily inevitable.”¹⁵ In this sense both Islamic and Christian theodicies have commonalities or things to learn from each other; this can be a fertile ground on which to dialogue.

Going from general to particular, in terms of disability, I found that, in the Islamic tradition suffering or affliction caused by events that lead to some form of harm or loss is often discussed in the light of Islamic belief about the omnipotent and omniscient God. In other words, both the Quran and Muslim traditions treat suffering as both an inevitable aspect of human experience, and as a problem of faith or theodicy, as it is ultimately the Almighty Creator who causes evil or suffering.¹⁶ Apropos of disability the Quran does not explain distinctly the reasons for disability or why God created PWD. In order to understand this very specific topic we must deduce specific conclusions from general information given by the Quran for which disability can be either caused by human error and neglect, or can be considered as a test.

Concerning the CC, by studying closely sacraments, regulations and provisions made about participation of PWD in the liturgy, their religious education, their employment and access to professions, and so on, the other sources of the CC, mainly Canon Law, CSD, CCC. By putting in the center humankind’s being created in the image and likeness of God and the dignity of every human person whatever his or her physical and mental condition, the CC is to make every effort to include PWD in every aspect of the Church, in every dimension of family and social life, at every level accessible to them and according to their possibilities. Without valorizing PWD, the CC sees disability as a “privilege” and a “place” where God manifests “love and

¹⁵ Cf. Yaran, 184.

¹⁶ Cf. Scott J. Fitzpatrick et al., “Religious Perspectives on Human Suffering: Implications for Medicine and Bioethics,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 55 (2016): 11.

crowns all [PWD and the nondisabled] with the glory of the resurrection,” “where humanity receives the strongest pushes and resources for a world based on solidarity, hope and love,” “in which to meet ‘the mystery of faith’ to be lived to the full in the daily life of the Church and society,” and finally “where normality and stereotypes are challenged and the Church and society are moved to search for that crucial point at which the human person is fully himself.”¹⁷

B) Proposal: Five Topics for Three Forms of Dialogue

As Pope Francis pointed out at the end of his apostolic visit to Turkey in 2015, it seems that the theological Muslim-Christian dialogue *per se* has come to an end. Nowadays, Muslims and Christians have to find new forms of dialogue, a dialogue based on an exchange of personal experiences and not only and exclusively on theology, made among religious men and women of different faiths.¹⁸ Therefore, after comparing both perspectives and underlining some commonalities and differences, now I would like to discuss eventual Muslim-Catholic dialogue and collaboration starting with disability, and moving toward PWD. A theological dialogue based on disability is still necessary to understand commonalities and divergent perspectives of both the CC and Muslims toward disability and the problem of evil and suffering. The outcomes of this theological dialogue may open the doors for an eventual cooperation in order to resolve issues related to PWD in their daily lives. The outcomes may also eventually lead to a dialogue based on religious experience. Relying on commonalities and differences of perspective that this research has shown, some questions and topics for dialogue may be listed as following:

- From a broad perspective, humankind and its creation in both belief systems,

¹⁷ Cf. The aforementioned five preparatory documents of the Committee for the Jubilee Day.

¹⁸ Francis, “Conferenza stampa durante il volo di ritorno,” in *Nella fede e nella carità: viaggio apostolico in Turchia (28-30 novembre 2014)*, 39-40.

- the dignity of human beings,
- their relationship with their Creator,
- perspectives of both belief systems toward health and well-being,
- body and mind,
- the problem of evil,
- the sense of suffering.

From a particular perspective, this list can be extended to a variety of topics and questions related to disability and PWD. In this regard, a starting point may be the terminology used by both the Quran and the Bible for PWD and different disabilities; how to read and translate them in light of the contemporary world's sensitivities and exigencies; comparing Jesus' and Muhammad's attitudes toward PWD as well as the reactions of their companions and other persons around them in instances in which Jesus heals or cures, and Muhammad employs or dispenses them from some duties, etc.

In terms of the problem of evil and suffering a dialogue may put at the center the following questions:

- Is disability "given?"
- Is disability a test of faith, or a punishment for our sins?
- How to deal with it?
- How to support PWD and their relatives?
- How to educate religious personnel (priests, muftis, nuns, and all other men and women) committed to PWD?

- Are sacred places used for worship, such as churches, mosques, chapels, masjids, welcoming for PWD, structured with respect for their needs?
- How can religious leaders as well as faith-based associations, NGO's, etc. propose and/or contribute to laws for PWD?
- What can we do together to prevent some disabilities?
- How can we pray together through disabilities, for and with PWD and their loved ones?

I pointed out some topics which in our opinion may be used to dialogue and at this point I would like to propose five different topics for eventual Muslim-Christian dialogues which are related to the contemporary Turkish society: (1) sin and disability seen as punishment, (2) consanguineous marriages (3rd and 4th degree), (3) abortion as a method to prevent birth of potentially disabled child, (4) abuse of disabled women and children, (5) charity and praying together. The topics which I am proposing as a ground for Muslim-Christian dialogue and collaboration in the context of Turkey are points related to the four main forms of dialogue proposed by DP as I have pointed out in the first chapter. I would like to consider them in a three-fold version unifying the dialogue of life with the dialogue of action, and calling it dialogue of life and collaboration:

(1) Theological dialogue or dialogue among experts, which generally aims to discover commonalities and divergences between religions in dialogue, in DP's words, a dialogue "where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values" (cf. DP 49).

(2) Dialogue of life and collaboration, in which Muslims and Christians come together in order to resolve problems they meet in daily life and to collaborate. Issues related to family,

mixed marriages, intercultural and humanitarian relationships, politics, economics, as well as social justice and peace-related topics are the main interest of this type of dialogue.

(3) Dialogue based on religious life experiences such as prayer, contemplation, meditation which encourages those who are involved in dialogue to share their feelings and spiritual outcomes of their respective pastoral and charitable activities.

I will consider the first topic, “Sin and disability seen as punishment,” in the context of theological dialogue or dialogue among experts; the following three topics, namely, “consanguineous marriages,” “abortion as a method to prevent birth of potentially disabled child,” and “abuse of disabled women and children” will be examined in the context of dialogue of life and collaboration. Finally, the fifth topic, “charity and praying together” will be pondered in the context of dialogue based on religious life experience. These three forms of dialogue, in fact, are linked to each other, so there should be no hierarchy of priorities among them, and they all together relate to human development and culture. The choice of any one of them depends on the concrete situation in which Christian communities and individual Christians are to live and the opportunities they offer (see DP 42). These forms have also their own challenges and difficulties to face, susceptible of natural, theological, or structural differences, of historical wounds as well as predispositions of religious representatives in dialogue. Furthermore, the five topics have their challenging points which certainly would render difficult eventual dialogues. However, as I believe that one of the main goals of dialogue is to overcome difficulties in view of the major benefits, which are in our case related to PWD, it is important to propose them. The identification and recognition of these difficulties and challenges would hopefully assist in reaching the desired benefits. That being said, at this point I would like to reflect first on the

eventual difficulties to be faced in Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey and then apply these five topics to three forms of dialogue.

1. Challenges and Mutual Compromises

Some of the topics listed above may be thought-provoking, fruitful, and easy to treat, but some are not so at all. Usually in Muslim-Christian dialogue meetings, Christian participants are more interested in listening to their Muslim partners talk about spiritual ties between Christians and Muslims, revelation of the Quran, the conception of God in Islamic thinking, etc., while they prefer talking about the Trinity, Jesus Christ as the son of God, original sin, the Scriptures and Christian revelation, etc. On the other hand, Muslims would gladly listen to their Christian partners talk about the Trinity, the place of Jesus in two religions, the controversial question of his crucifixion, the “distortion” of the Quran, the prophecy of Muhammad.

Just to give an example, one of the difficulties may come up especially from the Christian part by comparing Jesus’ and Muhammad’s attitudes toward PWD. As for Christians, Jesus Christ is the son of God, God’s incarnate word. Generally, Christians prefer to discuss Jesus Christ when the Quran is in question in terms of revelation. It follows that they tend to avoid discussing Jesus and Muhammad together because they do not consider correct a theological comparison made between those two. Actually, Islam as a post-Christian religion, especially the status of the Quran as revelation and of Muhammad as a prophet, has been a special challenge to Christianity.¹⁹ Alici sustains that during dialogue activities, while Muslims respect Jesus and Mary, Christians are often silent on Muhammad’s prophecy or they have a critical position in his regard. This attitude creates problems for Muslims and discourages them from attending

¹⁹ Jutta Sperber, *Christians and Muslims: The Dialogue Activities of the World Council of Churches and their Theological Foundation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 93.

dialogue activities among religious experts. PCID points out that Muslims are often saddened to see that their Christian friends do not grant to Muhammad the status of prophet, whereas they recognize that quality in Jesus. So PCID suggests to Christians “to try to appreciate the authentic value of the life and work of the Prophet of Islam, taking into consideration the time and the environment in which he lived.”²⁰

On the other hand, the insistence of Muslims toward Christians about Muhammad creates significant problems for the latter, because they realize that by ignoring their Muslim partners’ sensitivity on Muhammad a dialogue cannot be so fruitful.²¹ Zoë Hersov, a scholar interested in Islam and women, observes that Christians progressively started to treat Muhammad along with Hebrew prophets as an “extraordinary prophet,” since “unless non-Muslims can come to respect and admire [him], no real dialogue is possible, and there is certainly no hope of friendship.”²² This example shows that it would be better to clarify sensitive positions before initiating a dialogue. That said, I now would like to consider some sensitive issues proceeding from the general to particular.

a. Issues in Muslim-Christian Dialogue from a Turkish-Muslim Perspective

From a Turkish-Muslim perspective, although they believe in the “necessity and importance”²³ of Muslim-Christian dialogue, most Turkish-Muslim scholars often complain about the fact that activities of Muslim-Christian dialogue are proposed and run mostly by

²⁰ PCID, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, ed. Maurice Borrmans, M.Afr. (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1990), 57.

²¹ Cf. Mustafa Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu: Tarihçesi, çeşitleri, hedefleri, problemleri* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2005), 316-317.

²² Zoë Hersov, “A Muslim’s View of Charles de Foucauld: Some Lessons for the Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” *The Muslim World* 85/3-4 (1995): 315.

²³ Mustafa Köylü, *Dinler arası diyalog* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2007), 135.

Christians rather than Muslims. The main reason for this fact is seen in the institutionalization of interreligious dialogue in the CC and the CC's grounded experience in this sector. While living in multicultural societies, sharing the same complex problems caused by secularism and technology, the Quran's invitations to dialogue are the main reasons which encourage some of them to join Muslim-Christian dialogue. But some others feel that this activity is beyond their religious culture, in other words, it is something imposed by Christians. In the perception of the latter, the outcomes of Muslim-Christian dialogue initiatives at the end of the day serve the goals of the Christians. In fact, well-prepared dialogue initiatives are seen by many of them as a kind of evangelization aimed to promulgate the Christian creed to others. They also consider Muslim-Christian dialogue as a result of intellectual and cultural development of Christianity, and so they take it as a threat as well as a challenge for Muslim civilization and culture.²⁴

Generally, Muslims' perception of interreligious dialogue activities gives signs of some deeply rooted suspicions. In this sense Alici affirms that Muslims are suspicious about the Christian evolution of thinking toward other religions, in the sense that the openings made by the CC during and after Vatican II toward other religions are non-trustworthy for Muslims. They think that through dialogue activities, considered as a "preparation phase" of their influence, Christians try to increase their political, economic, and social impact in the world. It follows that by considering dialogue as a product of western secularism they are afraid that dialoging with Christians may be seen as an acceptance of secularism and its norms.²⁵ I personally do not agree with this position and the problem that they point out does not subsist in the context of Turkey. Those Muslim partners who are afraid of secularism and its norms, and so avoid Muslim-Christian dialogue, should take into account that Turkey is a secular country. In this regard I find

²⁴ See Alici, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 434.

²⁵ Ibid., 435-436.

very relevant the affirmation of Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, a Muslim in favor of complete secularism, who says, “tensions between Christian and Muslim communities usually arise when political and social problems are approached from a religious perspective or solved in religious terms.”²⁶ Indeed, secularism is not an obstacle but, at least in its ideal version, with its respect for and equidistance from all beliefs, is an opportunity for an authentic and safe dialogue.

This belief in my opinion may have its roots in some verses of the Quran, which have some negative perspectives toward Christians. Most significant of those is 5:51, which commands not to make friendship with those who do not respect sacred values: “Take not Jews and Christians as protectors. They are protectors of one another. And whosoever takes them as protectors, surely he is of them.” The word “protectors” translated from Arabic word “*awliyā*” (sing. *walī*) may be read also as “friends” or “allies.” Muslims can consider that “friendship” as “sharing the same lifestyle” and as a result they reject dialogue. Moreover, some misinterpreted attitudes and/or statements of some Christian leaders may contribute to this perception. Muslim partners expect their Christian peers to demonstrate clearly their sincerity; if not they can be labeled as “hypocrites” by Muslims. In this regard Alici recalls Card. Joseph Ratzinger’s aforementioned interview in *Le Figaro*, and argues that Ratzinger’s statements contradicted the invitation of Vatican II to all to forget the past.²⁷ This point may be seen by many, who do not know Turkish culture, sensitivity, and susceptibility of Turkish people well, as an exaggeration. However, the fact that in different instances, relationships between Turkey and Vatican City have been affected

²⁶ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, “Reflections on Community Relationship between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East,” in *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Papers Presented at the Broumana Consultation 12-18 July 1972*, ed. Stanley J. Samartha, John Taylor (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973), 101.

²⁷ See Alici, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 436-437. Here Alici refers to NA 3 which reads as follows: “Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all [hu]mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.”

by statements made by Vatican authorities regarding different topics, e.g., the “controversial” Armenian genocide, should be taken into account for the sustainability of Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Another topic, to which Muslims in Turkey are extremely sensitive, is missionary activities and proselytism. In this regard, a kind of paranoiac attitude constitutes a significant obstacle for the CC’s ordinary pastoral activities in general and interreligious dialogue activities in particular. While Alıcı points out that Muslims consider Muslim-Christian dialogue a “catalyzer” for missionary activities, Ali Rafet Özkan, a Turkish-Muslim scholar, holds that through dialogue the perspective of Turkish Muslims toward Turkish Christians considered by them as “others” is softened. As a result, Turkish Muslims lose their resistance toward Turkish Christians. It follows that Turkish Muslims who have lost their resistance and softened are more exposed to missionary activities.²⁸ According to Abdurrahman Küçük, another Turkish-Muslim scholar interested in the history of religions, those who are involved today in dialogue activities were the missionaries of yesterday. Therefore, they continue their missionary activities through dialogue. Küçük argues that the dialogue proposed by the CC is not an alternative of old style missionary activities yet a real and authentic version of proselytism adapted to current situations.²⁹ Consequently Muslims ask frequently that Christians make a clear distinction between dialogue, mission, and evangelization, and in fact that they abandon missionary activities completely.³⁰

Another position of this kind is held by Mahmut Aydın, a scholar of philosophy and religions, who argues that while the Vatican may increase its dialogue activities, it does not decrease its missionary activities. Although the Vatican openly condemns proselytism, it

²⁸ See Ali Rafet Özkan, “Diyalog eşit şartlarda yetkin eller tarafından yapılmalı,” *Türk Yurdu* 209 (2005): 41.

²⁹ Abdurrahman Küçük, “Dinlerarası diyalogün diğer yüzü üzerine,” *Türk Yurdu* 209 (2005): 6-8.

³⁰ Cf. Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, 106.

continues to proselytize, especially in the Balkans, Central Asia, and Anatolia in a very organized way, and the Secretariat for Non-Christians (renamed in 1988 the PCID) is a real sign of this.³¹ I find these considerations, shared also by some others,³² quite disputable as they divide Turkish society, and tend to privilege one faith group over another. However, they are relevant not only because they show the sensitivity toward so-called “missionary activities” of the CC but they also demonstrate the tendency in Turkish society to consider “others,” Christians, Jews, etc., as second-class citizens, a continuation of the Ottoman “*millet*”³³ system. This attitude constitutes a real obstacle in Muslim-Christian dialogue when Christian partners of the dialogue in question are Turkish citizens who do not want to be alienated or just tolerated rather than being recognized as full Turkish citizens. It is surprising that these considerations are coming from high-level academics who are educating and forming future generations, among them imams, lay theologians. The echoes of this negative perception on less educated people resulted in the assassination of some foreign bishops and priests as well as of some Turkish Protestants.

Another difficulty for Muslim partners in the dialogue is related to “self-stigma,” since many of them in front of their Christian partners find themselves not well enough prepared. Furthermore, Muslims are worried about efforts of Christians to turn Muslim-Christian dialogue

³¹ Mahmut Aydın, *Dinlerarası diyalog: Mahiyet, ilkeler ve tartışmalar* (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2008), 89-90; see also Mehmet Aydın, “Türkiye’ye yönelik Katolik misyonerliğinin dünü ve bugünü,” in *Türkiye’de misyonerlik faaliyetleri*, ed. ISAV (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2004), 121-122.

³² Küçük, “Dinlerarası diyalogun diğer yüzü üzerine,” 6-8.

³³ The Islamic society was basically formed by the *umma*, that is by the Muslim faithful while the followers of the other Biblical religions, Jews and Christians, called the people of the Book (*ahl al-Kitab*), which is the Bible, were considered as *dhimma* (the community) or *dhimmīs* (the persons), which means protected. The Ottoman socio-political concept and the corresponding juridical system of *millet* were based on the Islamic ethno-religious conception of *dhimma*. This system recognized the communitarian identity of the various ethnic groups, even if not territorial, with a limit, however that of being somehow subjects of the State of a second degree, with mutilated rights in comparison with the Muslim *umma*, in so far as the members of the various non-Muslim millets did not fully enjoy the same rights owned by the Muslim subjects. See Archbishop Boghos Levon Zekian, “The Iranian Oikumene and Armenia,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 9/2 (2005), 241.

into a systematic theological field because they believe that, if this field is developed by Christians, the latter will have an “intellectual superiority” on Muslims. As a result Islam would turn into a religion, a “passive object to benefit from,” and be dependent on Christians.³⁴ In addition, the Christian partners of the dialogue usually know quite well the languages spoken in Muslim countries, and they also study classical Arabic. Furthermore, Christians are institutionally very well organized in comparison to Muslims. Also Mahmut Aydın points out that one of the main problems of unsuccessful interreligious dialogue and unwillingness of Muslims to join the dialogue is the non-parity of parties.³⁵ This is quite understandable if we imagine a Turkish Muslim scholar, who does not know Arabic sufficiently, to be engaged in dialogue with an older Catholic scholar, who knows Quranic verses by heart. Christian partners may avoid pointing out these divergences when they exist; on the other hand, Muslim partners may consider this fact as an encouragement to study further rather than a humiliation. In this regard, making a self-criticism, Köylü in his book on interreligious dialogue argues that, “while the Western world forms and educates hundreds of scientists specialized in positive, humanistic, even in religious beliefs of others, the Muslim world has a very limited number of these experts.”³⁶ Indeed, some statements issued by certain high-level Muslim leaders, graduates of major Divinity Schools of Turkey, against Christians, about Christmas, New Year’s Eve celebrations, etc., confirm the necessity of more academic formation as well as reciprocal knowledge and respect.³⁷

³⁴ Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 438-439.

³⁵ Aydın, *Dinlerarası diyalog*, 33.

³⁶ Köylü, *Dinler arası diyalog*, 165.

³⁷ In this regard, I suggest the reading of the following article written by the well-known Turkish writer Elif Şafak. She not only points out the surprising negative statements of some top religious personalities, but also mentions one of the biggest social wounds of Turkish society of which we talk about broadly in the following pages of this dissertation, namely underage marriages, which account for 14 percent of all

Some other issues in Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey derive from the meanings given by some Muslim scholars to dialogue as well as to Islam as religion. In this regard, Muslims consider themselves as “the best community brought forth unto [hu]mankind” (cf. Quran 3:110). Consequently, some Muslim scholars may consider that dialogue with other religions is not so relevant or that they can simply be oblivious to dialogue. Some others, instead, relying on the same verse, believe that Muslims have the duty to invite all people to the truth, that is, Islam.³⁸ Another issue is attached to the perception of some Muslims who think that Christians give a very elevated Christian meaning to dialogue by considering it a dialogue of salvation, and through dialogue they fortify their “Holy Unity,” the unity of the Church. This is a further preoccupation for them because they believe that the unity of the Church is much more solid, functional, dynamic, and institutionalized than the Muslim community.³⁹ This rhetoric may seem to those who are far away from the Turkish-Muslim world quite strange and surprising, however it is very common in Turkish religious academic literature as well as in the popular speeches of contemporary political life.⁴⁰

marriages in Turkey: Elif Şafak, “Turkey’s Vote Against Christmas,” *Financial Times*, December 24, 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/be49e7ac-aa31-11e5-9700-2b669a5aeb83>.

³⁸ Cf. Köylü, *Dinler arası diyalog*, 164.

³⁹ Cf. Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 439-440.

⁴⁰ While finalizing this chapter, in a speech given to supporters in the western Turkish city of Sakarya, the Turkish President invoked the medieval religious wars between Christian Europe and the Islamic Middle East in the context of escalating tensions between the European Union and Turkey: “Shame on the EU. Down with your European principles, values and justice... They started a clash between the cross and the crescent.” Ece Toksabay, et al., “Turkey’s Erdogan says Dutch PM Rutte Lost Turkey’s Friendship,” *Reuters*, March 16, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-referendum-netherlands-erdogan-idUSKBN16N1T8>.

b. Issues in Muslim-Christian Dialogue from a Christian Perspective

Although dialogue with non-Christians has been quite a long journey for the CC, in some instances it seems that for Christians dialogue still needs to find its theological place in Christian thinking. One of the difficulties comes up when the divinity of Jesus Christ is questioned by Muslim partners. PCID highlights it in the following way: “while recognizing with joy the position of greatness and of privilege granted to Jesus by the Quran, Christians are also aware of the fundamental differences which separate Muslim belief from the Christian belief in Jesus as Son of God and God Himself.”⁴¹ Another difficulty is shown when the Scriptures of both religions, the Bible and the Quran, are to be compared. For Christians divine revelation reaches its climax in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and every book which speaks of God must be cherished in terms of that principle, and according to the rules of sound religious judgment regarding the “inspired books.”⁴² In the opinion of the CC, as Christians reading and analyzing the Quran, talking about it with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and searching for the fruits of the Spirit in the foundational texts as well as in the lives of representatives of other religions are all a theological duty coming from the development of Christian thinking.⁴³ Some Christians are afraid that the commonalities in some perspectives can put both religions on the same level with the inevitable risk of falling into syncretism. This concern is shared also by some Muslims, who in order to avoid syncretism, do not appreciate the usage of the expression “Abrahamic religions” and instead of Muslim-Christian dialogue propose “alliance of civilizations.”⁴⁴ The risk of syncretism has its roots in a special form of religious indifference which is expressed in

⁴¹ PCID, *Guidelines for Dialogue*, 54.

⁴² Ibid., 49.

⁴³ Cf. Christian W. Troll, S.J., *Açıklayabilmek için ayırdetmek: Hristiyan-Müslüman diyalogunda yerini ve yönünü belirlemek* (Istanbul: Sent Antuan Kilisesi, 2008), 195-196.

⁴⁴ Ramazan Uçar, *Dinler arası diyalog* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2012), 153.

terms of “all religions say the same. Why should they talk about differences? Let us rather go on together, on the path of the unique and only divine truth.”⁴⁵

Concerning theological dialogue, to start from dogmas would create a chance for direct confrontation between the two religions. And since at this level, commonalities are less than differences, there would always be some risk of leaving at any moment. In this regard it is believed that, in order to promote trust and to avoid crisis, it would be better to concentrate initially on practical issues and put theology aside.⁴⁶ I agree that concentrating on practical issues and collaborating on daily life problems that we share with our Muslim brothers and sisters is more productive and often easier than theological discussions; this is why I have chosen disability as a ground for Muslim-Christian dialogue. However, I also hold that an exclusion or elimination of theological dialogue in order to overcome possible confrontations would not be an honorable and fruitful way. Theological dialogue provides theoretical and inspirational bases of other forms of dialogue, which are not clearly separated but interconnected.

In some dialogue encounters there are also representatives of some other Christian denominations. Therefore, in some instances Catholics may have difficulty in expressing themselves freely as they are afraid to be judged by the representatives of other denominations, or by their peers of other religious orders as well as their superiors (a Catholic priest in the presence of a Catholic bishop, or of an orthodox priest, etc.).

Differences, different points of view, ideologies, terminology, prejudices, political positions, moral values as well as the wars of the past between Christians and Muslims all create problems for a sincere, authentic, and fruitful dialogue. Jutta Sperber, a German theologian focused on

⁴⁵ Arij A. Roest Crolius, S.J., “Interreligious Dialogue Can It Be Sincere?” in *Understanding and Discussion: Approaches to Muslim-Christian Dialogue*, ed. Arij A. Roest Crolius, S.J. (Rome: PUG, 1998), 66.

⁴⁶ Cf. Sperber, *Christians and Muslims*, 107.

Muslim-Christian dialogue, points out indeed that, “[n]o other subject in the Christian-Muslim dialogue was as permanent and comprehensive as political issues of all kinds” and holds that “this was caused less by the Christian participants, who tended to be more interested in theological subjects, and must be mainly attributed to the Muslims.”⁴⁷ In my opinion, the Turkish experience confirms her observation. Islamic fundamentalism coming from some Muslim countries and the so-called political Islam which grounds its inspirations on a fundamentalist interpretation of religious sources pose difficulties. At some level Christians, too, accuse their Muslim peers of insincerity. While Islam claims that religious freedom comes from Islam, on the other hand they do not permit a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man, or a Muslim to convert to Christianity or to another religion. Muslims live freely in western countries and enjoy the benefits of democracy, of a constitutional state. They can even sometimes use Christian churches for their worship, and convert Christians to their religion. On the other hand, some Muslim countries with Christian minorities create problems for their Christian citizens: Saudi Arabia does not permit Christians to worship in Mecca and Medina; Turkey does not allow its Christian citizens to have a military career, does not recognize the juridical status of the CC, and does not permit the Catholic, Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic Churches and others to open their own seminaries for formation of their seminarians.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 135; In this regard Gülen argues that, “Islam also is seen as a political ideology because it has been the greatest dynamic in the Muslims’ wars of independence. Thus, it has become identified as an ideology of independence. Ideology tends to separate, while religion means enlightenment of the mind together with belief, contentment, and tranquility of the heart, sensitivity in conscience and perception through real experience. Religion also has the nature and ability to penetrate by means of such essential virtues as faith, love, mercy, and compassion. Reducing religion to a harsh political ideology and a mass ideology of independence has led to walls forming between Islam and the West, and has caused Islam to be misunderstood.” Fethullah Gülen, *The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective* (np: Light Inc., 2004), 3.

For Christian partners of dialogue, these and other attitudes and restrictions contradict their claims and render difficult both cohabitation and eventual dialogues based on it. In fact, when these topics are brought to the dialogue table, the encounters risk being terminated. However, as pointed out by Daniel A. Madigan, an Australian Jesuit expert on interreligious dialogue who studied and worked also in Turkey, “there is a world of difference between reciprocity as a *condition* for dialogue, and reciprocity as a hoped-for *outcome* of dialogue.” We recognize difficulties, however we also believe that if we set conditions to our dialogue with Muslims we are betraying our faith rather than defending it, because reciprocity is not a Christian value as gratuity is.⁴⁸

As highlighted before, when I say dialogue I do not mean only theological dialogue, and so dialogue is not restricted only to experts or to theologians, but it happens also in society in terms of cohabitation, in the daily life of Muslims and Christians living in multicultural societies. In this regard, Christians in Turkey may see pluralistic ambiances of different people as a risk for their own vocations, and they may be afraid to dialogue or risk losing their identities. When one is a minority, everyone needs to have a clear identity, shown openly and accepted by others with respect. Sometimes in Turkey it is difficult to bring together Christians of different ethnicities, even though they share the same confession. How then can we imagine Muslim-Christian dialogue? An emblematic example is the effort of Christians in Turkey not to use words like Allah, *inshallah*, *kader*, *kismet*,⁴⁹ and so on. It follows that, instead of using the Arabic word

⁴⁸ See Daniel A. Madigan, S.J., “Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Difficult Times,” in *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. James L. Heft, S.M. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 68-70.

⁴⁹ *Inshallah* is the Arabic language expression for “God willing” and it is generally used by Muslims, or Arabic speakers of other religions to refer to events that one hopes will happen in the future. Concerning *kader* and *kismet*, these two Turkish words are usually used one for another, meaning predestination, eternal preordination, destiny or fate.

“Allah” many Turkish-Christians prefer *Tanrı* coming from the Turkic form, *Tengri*; *Tanrı* in modern Turkish is used to refer to any “god” or to the Abrahamic God.

2. Five Topics for Three Forms of Dialogue and Collaboration

After having discussed some eventual difficulties for Muslim-Christian dialogue, now I would like to proceed to deepen the five topics which I have proposed. Applying these to the three forms of dialogue introduced above, I will also take into account eventual challenges to be faced, as well as some compromises to be made by two parties, Muslims and Christians, in order to keep a dialogue going. I will do my considerations while taking into account the characteristics of contemporary Turkey.

a. Theological Dialogue based on Sin and Disability as a Punishment

In chapters II and III, dedicated respectively to the perspectives of Islam and the CC, I have shown in detail how the thinking of two religions tied sin to disability. Moreover, in the discussion above where I compared the Quran and the Bible I concluded that even though in the Quran and in the Old Testament there are some instances which link afflictions and disabilities to punishment given by God for sins, both religions in the end reject categorically a direct connection between disability and punishment (cf. Quran 17:15; Jn 9:3).

In this dialogue experts and religious men and women involved in the dialogue would try together to discover Christian and Muslim perspectives on disability, giving particular attention to the relation between sin and disability seen as a punishment. Their starting point is a common mentality shared by believers of both religions. In order to find out the provenience of this mentality they would study the Scriptures of both religions, followed by other major sources, as

done in this research. It would be expected that by looking for commonalities in and divergences between perspectives of their religions they would “seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values” (cf. DP 43).

Once the goals are established, the partners involved in the dialogue should be aware of the aforementioned difficulties which are commonly encountered in Muslim-Christian dialogue. This type of dialogue, indeed, can give occasion to study closely theologies and to know each other better. However, it may also cause big debates, crises, etc., because in a certain sense it does not allow much space for human relationships to develop. That having been said, a first difficulty may come up regarding comparison between the Bible and the Quran. Christian partners should already know and respect how their Muslim peers consider the Quran to be the last revelation of God, and Muhammad the last prophet. In the same way, Muslim partners should already know and respect how their Christian peers consider Jesus Christ to be Son of God, his incarnated word, and the Gospel to have been revealed by the Holy Spirit to some of his disciples and to other authors. Knowing the fundamentals of each other’s beliefs helps all to proceed well, and that respecting each other does not mean betrayal of their faith, relativism, or syncretism.

Partners should be aware that many differences may come up; so they should be open to confrontation and sometimes to criticisms. What is important and necessary in order to keep the dialogue going is that these confrontations and criticisms follow common sense, are constructive, and aim to discover major benefit. Being realistic is important; one should keep in mind that “these differences have caused wars for centuries.”⁵⁰ Sometimes dialogue can be built only on commonalities, as in our case, since both religions reject the perception of disability as a

⁵⁰ Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 318.

punishment for sin. However, even when the dialogue is built on commonalities, sometimes unexpected issues and discussions may happen. Partners involved in theological dialogue need to listen, understand, accept, and learn from each other. To hide or to soften personal views in order to keep dialoguing is not fruitful. This attitude can make the other part think that there is a hidden agenda. Partners in dialogue sometimes can understand each other in the wrong way. The two religions are based on Abraham and so the theological languages that they employ are close enough. However, terms like God, revelation, soul, prophet, book, angels, heaven and hell, etc. may have different meanings and nuances. So having a positive attitude and considering these as richness may be helpful for a dialogue. It follows that “the ability to use the theological language, methods, and authorities of the other tradition, to feel the weight of the other tradition’s theological questions, and so to engage with the other on his or her home ground”⁵¹ assumes a quite significant importance.

Following the comparison between two Scriptures, as happened in this research, these two verses from the Quran and the Bible would come up:

Whosoever is rightly guided is only rightly guided for the sake of his own soul, and whosoever is astray is only astray to its detriment. None shall bear the burden of another” (Quran 17:15).

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ... “Neither he nor his parents sinned” (Jn 9:3).

Then in a further step partners can study together other main sources of their respective religions in order to see the reception of these and other verses in their traditions. The differences

⁵¹ Madigan, “Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Difficult Times,” 72.

of interpretation may cause provocations, discussions, or criticisms but all these eventualities can be overcome with the already suggested understanding and respect. That is because “the distinctiveness of dialogue is not found in its purpose, but in a pattern of behavior, by which other persons are welcomed, their speech is carefully heard and the fact of their difference accepted.”⁵² The dialogue can proceed by sharing some significant personalities, religious men and women, scholars, and so on, as well as their positions, experiences, writings. In this regard, for instance, we can imagine Christian and Muslim partners of this particular theological dialogue sharing respectively Fethullah Gülen’s and Nancy Mairs’ thoughts as I did in this research. Knowing very well the Turkish culture and having already had some Muslim-Christian dialogue experience in this country, I can preview some initial difficulties in the reception of these two different figures. In most of Muslim-Christian dialogue encounters organized in Turkey I have personally noticed that the majority of participants were male and that especially among Turkish-Muslim scholars there is a diffused anti-feminist attitude.⁵³ So the writings of a fierce woman like Mairs may create difficulties at least initially. However, I believe that the deepness of Mairs’ thoughts based on her own experience would easily surmount difficulties.

In this instance, I would make an example taking a single point from Gülen and Mairs. As already mentioned, Gülen calls PWD, *garip*, that is “piteous, pitiful.” The reason Gülen calls them *garip* is that because of their disabilities they are condemned, defied, oppressed. They are not encouraged or rehabilitated and society does not support them in this regard. He adds, “if they are aware of their being piteous, if they go to Allah, they will gain the Hereafter by Allah’s favor. But this is also very difficult. It is quite difficult to get rid of such kinds of psychoses and

⁵² PCID, *Guidelines for Dialogue*, 29.

⁵³ In this regard see Antuan Ilgit, S.J., “Social Gender and Islamic Feminist Discourse: Are There Interactions with Christian Feminist Discourse?” *Studia Moralia*, 53/2 (2015): 293-315; see also Hidayet Şefkatli Tuksal, *Kadın karşıtı söylemin İslam geleneğindeki izdüşümleri* (Ankara: Otto, 2012), 19-33.

to thank Allah Almighty even in the worst situations and to say, ‘Allah is enough; the rest is whim.’”⁵⁴

It is good that Gülen recognizes the condemnation, defiance, and oppression which PWD face in society. Furthermore, for some it may be good spiritual advice to invite them to accept their situation, to be patient as a faith journey with some spiritual benefits. However, in the contemporary world calling PWD *garip*, piteous, pitiful, whatever spiritual significance we want those words to carry, is not acceptable anymore. Mairs rightly says indeed that PWD are not “pitiful creatures huddled helplessly beneath a blizzard of miseries blown down by some capricious power amusing himself at our expense. God is with(in) each of us, and to the extent that we recognize and honor God’s presence in one another, we form and dwell in the Community of God.”⁵⁵

It follows that we should review how our terminology, the terms we use to define things and situations, without experiencing in our own body what we define, can deeply hurt the subjects of our definitions. It is not easy to understand what a person with some disabilities would feel from the word “handicapped” or “crippled.” In effect, Mairs refused to participate in the degeneration of the language: “I refuse to pretend that the only differences between you and me are the various ordinary ones that distinguish any one person from another.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, in a reactionary, defying way, she defined herself a cripple: I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are

⁵⁴ Fethullah Gülen, “Engelliler ve asıl engeller,” (AUDIO in Turkish), Hizmet Movement Website, January 4, 2010, <http://www.herkul.org/bamteli/engelliler-ve-asil-engeller/>.

⁵⁵ Nancy Mairs, *Ordinary Time: Cycles in Marriage, Faith, and Renewal* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 186-187.

⁵⁶ Nancy Mairs, *Plain Text* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 10.

‘handicapped’ and ‘disabled’ ... People – crippled or not – wince at the word ‘cripple,’ as they do not at ‘handicapped’ or ‘disabled.’”⁵⁷

The dialogue that I am proposing encourages this kind of comparison, based on the experiences of people. Otherwise, these dialogue encounters risk to be done among males, without any significant experience of women, PWD, or others and continue to use language which is not updated. In this regard, through this research especially on Islamic sources, I found they used very archaic language weighted by many Arabic, Persian words which are no longer accepted by Turkish people, especially by youth. In this way, the dialogue can turn into a dialogue of the deaf, or in DP’s words “reduced to theological exchange, dialogue might easily be taken as a sort of luxury item ... a domain reserved for specialists” (DP 43).

That being said, this theological dialogue can also be concluded with some sort of comparison of religious leaders’ speeches and/or pastoral letters. The aim of this final part is to advise, to help religious leaders to translate outcomes of mutual theological reflections into a broad more pastoral language to reach believers. In this regard the current president of the Diyanet, Mehmet Görmez’s words on the connection of sin and disability as a punishment are a good example:

What kind of sin did you commit in order to receive a disabled child? This perception belongs to the period which precedes Islam, and it is absolutely not accepted by Islam. To consider disability as a punishment rather than a test is against the teaching of Islam, and consequently, we have the duty of explaining this to society. The Diyanet has to announce to PWD that every effort of patience demonstrated by them before all kind of disabilities, is part of prophet Eyyûb’s patience, and therefore will take them to Heaven.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸ “Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Görmez’den engelli vatandaşlara iftar yemeği,” August 24, 2011, www.diyaret.gov.tr.

These words, for instance, can be put alongside some speeches of Pope Francis, some of which I have already mentioned. The theological dialogue started by studying the Scriptures and the main sources of the two religions, and continued by sharing some real experiences, can be concluded and reach the following main outcomes: (1) major understanding of each other's perspectives, (2) translating together the theological considerations in broad terms aimed to reach the correct category of people, and (3) opening to other forms of dialogue. In effect, theological exchange is very important but it should not be considered as the only way to dialogue. Because the different forms are interconnected, contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values (see DP 43).

b. Dialogue of Life Experiences and Action

Even though there are theological divergences between the two religions they also have significant commonalities in their points of view on health care, usage of earthly resources, ecological balance, responsibilities toward the environment, etc. Since they share the same words they also share the same responsibilities. Since they both are active in social life, they also have common dangers and challenges against which to fight together, such as “materialism which menaces religions, modernist thinking such as religious indifference,”⁵⁹ pointed out on many occasions by Pope Benedict XVI as relativism. Others such as protection of family, a morally acceptable sexual life, collaboration in cases of natural afflictions, etc., may be considered among possible topics to treat in this kind of dialogue. In other words, the two religions can have

⁵⁹ Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 303.

a fertile dialogue starting from these topics in order to find together necessary solutions as well as to build collaborations.

The dialogue of life experiences and action relies on the concrete experiences of believers of different religions, and involves not only those who are clerics or scholars, but also common citizens. In other words, as PCID says, “[w]e cannot restrict the encounter between Christians and Muslims to circles of specialists or to visits by the leaders of communities. Dialogue includes all aspects of life and can be found in every place where Muslims and Christians live and work together, love, suffer, and die.”⁶⁰ For followers of both religions it may be helpful to observe their Scriptures and narratives created around Jesus Christ and Muhammad regarding their dialogues with others. In the case of Jesus Christ one can see that he was in contact with all people, without distinction, with religious leaders, military officials, poor, rich, prostitutes, tax collectors, women, children, sick, and PWD, and as a result in many cases was cast out by religious leaders of his own earthly time. In the New Testament in different instances we see Saint Paul invite people to bless their persecutors (Rm 12:14), not to repay anyone evil for evil (12:17), to encourage one another and build one another up in order to live peacefully in society (1 Thes 5:11). Therefore, one of the main reason for Christians to build dialogue with Muslims, with whom they share their daily lives, should be these attitudes. The same is valid for Muslims as they can find significant narratives in the Hadith regarding Muhammad’s attitudes toward Jewish and Christian leaders, religious, and people of other categories, believers of both religions, with a long history on their shoulders, and living inevitably in the same societies. Looking at the examples of their religious inspirations, they should try to find ways to dialogue. However, as we all know from experience, the ideal does not always correspond to the reality,

⁶⁰ PCID, *Guidelines for Dialogue*, 29.

and although the dialogue of cohabitees can rely on many shared topics, it also has significant difficulties.

The second, third, and fourth topics, namely, consanguineous marriages, abortion as a method to prevent the birth of potentially disabled child, and the abuse of disabled women and children which I proposed as possible topics for eventual dialogues, can be considered in this form of dialogue as it brings together Muslims and Christians in order to resolve problems they meet in daily life and to collaborate. In Turkish society, which is multicultural, especially among the Kurdish population (which includes both Muslim and Christian believers) consanguineous marriages are not a rare phenomenon. One of the results of these marriages is children with disabilities. A preventive measure would be to avoid consanguineous marriages. Unfortunately, though very contestable, where there is a certainty of disability either in cases of pregnancy following consanguineous marriages or in other cases, abortion of the disabled fetus is seen as a preventive measure. Finally, concerning the cases of abuse, in these last years, many tragic cases of child abuse have happened in school dormitories run by Islamic foundations -- one of which, the Ensar Foundation, has close links to the Turkish government,⁶¹ and in other places. The general tendency of the government was immediately to cover up the issue, and to restrict media access. Meanwhile many cases of abuse, violence, and killings happened, in which women were involved as victims, and both the government and the Diyanet issued controversial statements, which hurt the feelings of many.⁶²

Therefore, I believe that both Islam and the CC through their teachings, preaching, and related accompanying activities, can help people to avoid consanguineous marriages, not to

⁶¹ Cf. Selin Girit, "Turkey Child Abuse: Scandal Shocks Karaman," *BBC News*, April 19, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36071773>.

⁶² See pp. 44.

consider abortion as an affordable and easily accessible preventive method, and by raising awareness to protect women and children with disabilities from abuse. However, these social problems, especially consanguineous marriages and the abuse of disabled women and children, are very sensitive in Turkey. It follows that, proposing a dialogue table on these social wounds, once again would not be so easy. One of the first issues to show up would be the general tendency of Muslims not to share their daily struggles with others, in this case with Christians.⁶³ This kind of discretion is part of Turkish culture. However, in question is human life, and consanguineous marriages are widespread and also are one of the significant reasons for children with disability, and finally the abuse of women and children with disabilities continues being a social wound. Therefore, religious men and women, who follow, share, and comfort those believers, who face these issues in their daily lives, have to come together to dialogue.

Regarding child sexual abuse (CSA), the CC is not proud of it, however, recognizing humbly the fact that the CC, too, has had to face the same issue, and the majority awareness reached today, even with some imperfections, is the fruit of a long journey, may encourage our Muslim partners to be involved in dialogue based on these topics. Moreover, issues of consanguineous marriages and episodes of violence against women, with disabilities or not, are encountered also in Western cultures as well as among some Christian families living among the Kurdish population in the south-east and east of Turkey. Cultural interactions are the inevitable consequence of living in multicultural societies, as Turkey is. When I was living and ministering as a priest for Turkish-speaking Christian community in Ankara, I noticed, for instance, that many of the Christian women saw no problem about induced abortion or divorce followed by a

⁶³ Cf. Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 449.

second marriage. They justified these attitudes by saying, “everyone (meaning their Muslim cohabitants) does this here, and Turkish law allows us to do so.”

Having said that, before making further considerations, I would like to present some studies made regarding consanguineous marriages, and the abuses of women and children with disabilities in Turkey. These considerations will help to understand eventual difficulties to encounter in Muslim-Christian dialogue on these topics.

Consanguineous Marriages

According to TCC a male or female who has reached the age of seventeen with the permission of their legal representative (art. 126), and any man or woman who has reached the age of eighteen can be married without the consent of a representative (art. 124). While a man or woman who does not complete age sixteen cannot marry under any circumstances, those who have completed sixteen can be married with the permission of a judge in the presence of extraordinary circumstances and causes (art. 124 §2). While these rules are respectful of universal rules (though perhaps those who have completed sixteen might marry with the permission of a judge), the big problem for Turkey remains the so-called “imam marriages.” These cases allow marriage of very young children with very old adults, to which the law has not yet found a solution. A recent bill which would have allowed men accused of raping underage girls to be cleared if they marry the girl,⁶⁴ was withdrawn by the government following reactions and manifestations made by secularist Turkish people. If the bill had passed imam marriages would have been legalized.

⁶⁴ See Mark Lowen, “Turkish Bill Clears Men of Statutory Rape If They Marry,” *BBC News*, November 18, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38030182>.

I see at the center of these issues the family which constitutes the basis of society. Although it may differ in terms of structure and function the family exists in every society. It performs many important functions for society. For the CC “marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values,”⁶⁵ since “man and woman were made for each other ... and in marriage God unites them in a such a way that, by forming one flesh, they can transmit human life” (CCC 372), and this covenant between baptized persons “has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (CCC 1601). It follows that “a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved” (CCC 409). Consanguinity is among the impediments to a valid marriage (cf. c. 1091); it consists in the bond due to blood ties. People generated from each other are blood relatives in a straight line, while those who have a parent in common are consanguineous in oblique or collateral line. Depending on the line and the degree of consanguinity it is possible to ask for an eventual Diocesan Ordinary dispensation.

In Islam, instead, marriage is not a religious institution as it is in Christianity, though it has been given great importance and people have been encouraged by various verses and hadiths to establish families. The major reasons Islam encourages the establishment of a family are that it is (1) a place where people find serenity, (2) an instrument for the continuity of the descendants and (3) a deterrent from various evils which are regarded as sinful (see Quran 30:21; 16:72; 24:32). Islam by establishing certain restriction of blood, milk, and affinity (cf. 4:23) practically implements a family exogamy. In addition, it can be said that there is a broad sense of endogamy following the rule that Muslim women can marry only Muslim men and Muslim men only people of the Book, that is Jews and Christians. It is also forbidden to marry a stepmother or a

⁶⁵ John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* [Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World], n. 1, (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1981), 11.

brother's wife (cf. 4:19). Only after a brother's death, his younger brother can validly marry his wife. Marriage is prohibited with a stepmother no matter what the form is (cf. 4:22).

In Islam, the family is essentially based on monogamy. But under certain circumstances, a husband is allowed to marry up to four times simultaneously. However, it should not be forgotten that this is not an order but a license that is referred to under certain conditions. In the Islamic family there is no place for adoption because this is considered as an artificial relationship. Even though taking care of an orphan is considered a duty for all Muslims and the Islamic state, this does not constitute a kinship or a two-sided heritage; therefore, it does not create an obstacle for marriage between parties. In some Muslim societies where polygamy is legally permissible people who do not have siblings prefer a second marriage instead of adopting. Islam has allowed divorce under certain conditions. According to Mehmet Âkif Aydın, an author of the Diyanet's *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the accepted system of divorce is "a middle way between Jewish practice which degenerates divorce and Christian [Catholic] practice which never accepts it." Muhammad has various orders and advice for the parties to treat each other well and to keep the family together. Spouses who are incompatible with each other are divorced as a final solution. Before this, a solution of the dispute among the spouses is sought. If this is not possible, the dispute is brought to a person chosen by both families (cf. 4:35). If nothing still happens, divorce is allowed as a last resort.⁶⁶

Turkey is a country where approximately one-third of the population still lives in rural areas. So the village and the peasantry are major social facts, and despite increasing urbanization, these facts still have great importance in contemporary Turkish society.⁶⁷ The marriage system in

⁶⁶ Mehmet Âkif Aydın, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2, s.v. "Aile" (İstanbul: TDV, 2001), 199-200.

⁶⁷ Ali Arslan et al., "Türkiye'de geçmişten geleceğe kadın, evlilik ve aile," *Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 37 (2015): 629.

Turkish society has changed from a lineage exogamous system to a system which has no norm, due to the effect of Islam. But in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey, where Kurdish and Arabic cultures are diffused, people still continue with lineage endogamy based on the tribal system, which is still quite normative. But it tends to lose its power in urban areas, and variables such as education and occupation gain importance in the regulation of marriage.⁶⁸ The age at which women first marry is well below that of men. Approximately ninety percent of Turkish women are married at twenty-four years of age or younger. The proportion of men married under the age of twenty-five is less than that of women around sixty-five percent. In marriages under the age of eighteen, the gender-based difference is more striking: the proportion of males aged eighteen and under, which can be considered quite early, does not reach seven percent, while the proportion of girls is close to thirty-two percent. The proportion of marriages that occur in rural areas under the age of eighteen is about forty-six percent more than urban areas.⁶⁹

The percentage of marriages among relatives is quite high, around thirty percent. Consanguineous marriages are found particularly in wealthy families who are on the spot. Because of the underlying tendency to keep family properties in the family. Half of the rich families have a tendency to marry within a group of relatives. On the contrary, this tendency decreases in the middle-class families and the poor, by half. Moving from these findings and observations, it can be concluded that the poor and especially poor women see marriage as a means of salvation from socio-economic problems they have experienced.⁷⁰

The striking result of all these mores in Turkish society, especially in rural areas of the country, is children with disabilities. A research study made to evaluate the causes of severe

⁶⁸ N. Serpil Altuntek, "Türkiye üzerine yapılmış evlilik ve akrabalık araştırmalarının bir değerlendirmesi," *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 18/2 (2001): 17-28, 17.

⁶⁹ Arslan et al., "Türkiye'de geçmişten geleceğe kadın, evlilik ve aile," 661.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 663.

visual impairment in legally blind children in the East Mediterranean region of Turkey, based on one hundred and eighty-five children attending schools for the blind, found a history of consanguineous marriage in parents of 104 (56.2 percent) patients confirming a high correlation between blindness and consanguineous marriage. The socio-cultural-economic levels of the families were generally low. Eighty-five subjects had graduated from primary school and forty-six percent of families had an income of the minimum wage (\$385 per month) or less. The total consanguineous marriage rate among the parents was 57.8 percent. 104 of the subjects had parents with second-degree consanguinity (cousin-marriages) and the tertiary degree consanguineous marriage (children of cousins) percentage was 1.6 percent. Consanguineous marriage was significantly correlated to close relatives with disease. Learning disabilities and mental retardation were detected in thirteen students. One student had growth retardation (0.54 percent).⁷¹ The most important cause of childhood blindness in Turkey, indeed, is hereditary pathologies, while “the diseases that can be prevented with early intervention during childhood were found to be less prominent. The most effective approach to prevent most of these cases is to lower parental consanguinity rate.”⁷²

Abortion as a Method to Prevent the Birth of a Potentially Disabled Child

As the studies presented above demonstrate, there is a close relationship between consanguineous marriages, as well as those “imam marriages” which oblige under-aged girls to unite with an older man from her family circle. If the efforts to lower parental consanguinity rate have not yet given promising results, the abortion of potentially disabled children remains still a

⁷¹ See Adnan Aksoy et al., “Evaluation of Children in Two Blind Schools in the East Mediterranean Region in Turkey,” *Ret-Vit* 20 (2012): 218-220.

⁷² A. Turan et al., “Blindness in Turkey: A National Survey Among Schools for Visually Disabled,” *Turkish Journal of Ophthalmology* 3 (2002): 397-400.

lifebuoy to resolve the issue. In chapter two we mentioned that there are two main positions in Islam. While the first considers abortion not possible (*cā'iz*) at any stage of pregnancy, the second considers it in the early stages of pregnancy as not prohibited (*harām*); according to some representatives of this group, abortion is reprehensible (*makruh*), while for others it is allowed (*mubah*). General understanding among Turkish-Muslim scholars suggests that the best thing would be to consider abortion not possible at any stage of pregnancy. However, if there is a risk for the health of the mother, abortion should be possible without looking at the stage of ongoing pregnancy. Likewise, in cases where there is certainty that, when the child grows up it will not have sufficient intellectual capacity to manage itself, the decision should be entrusted to a competent physician.

Concerning the CC, it does not allow voluntary abortion in any case, and therefore also not in the case of a potentially disabled fetus. An exception is made for so-called therapeutic abortions and only in those situations where the life of mother is considered in absolute danger and there is no chance to save the fetus. Even in those situations, the mother in question is given the possibility to continue the pregnancy. In other words, in some serious situations such as ectopic pregnancy, preeclampsia and chorioamnionitis (an inflammation of the fetal membranes due to a bacterial infection) doctors have to carry out their mission of caring for all life, that of the mother and that of the child, without discrimination. In this regard an innocent life cannot directly be suppressed to save another. In extreme cases where it is no longer possible to save the life of the child and only then -- in the face of real inability to save the child -- there is need responsibly to

save at least the mother's life. This, however, depends on the concreteness of the clinical situation and is certainly not a choice that favors one life over another.⁷³

In the current situation, these positions are already foreseen in current Turkish law on abortion to which I have dedicated sufficient space in Chapter II. In a nutshell, according to Turkish legislation after the tenth week of pregnancy, it is possible to stop a pregnancy in the presence of conditions that can cause the death of the mother or a serious handicap for the unborn or mostly genetic conditions that can result in severe disabilities in the unborn. The teaching of the Diyanet, on the other hand, does not consider abortion lawful even without risk to the health of the mother and/or the unborn child. On this point I think a fruitful dialogue is possible.

Abuse of Disabled Women and Children

Violence or abuse against women and children is one of the most common violations of human rights, and it takes in all levels such as economic, physical, psychological, and sexual violence. As is the case all over the world, violence is a denial of fundamental rights and freedoms, especially of economic and social rights, and it affects the lives of women and children with disabilities in Turkey too. However, I should also point out that violence against women and children with disabilities is not so visible and policies which have been developed to prevent it are not sufficient enough. Research shows that one out of every three women worldwide is estimated to suffer violence at least once in her life, and in the context of Turkey two out of five women undergo physical violence. According to the data given by the General

⁷³ Cf. Maurizio Faggioni, O.F.M., *La vita nelle nostre mani: manuale di bioetica teologica* (Torino, Edizioni Camilliane, 2009), 299-300; see also Card. Elio Sgreccia, *Personalist Bioethics: Foundations and Applications* (Philadelphia, PA: The National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2012), 346.

Directorate of the Status of Women, about forty-two percent of Turkish women suffer from physical and sexual domestic violence.⁷⁴

In Turkish society, speaking of violence is generally a tough issue for women, but it is even more difficult and problematic for women with disabilities to speak about violence or to report it to judicial authorities. The main reason for this difficulty is that the disabled woman cannot easily leave the very environment of the violence to report it to law enforcement agencies or civil society organizations. Another issue is the lack of access to women refuge centers, where there are any. Since women with some disabilities cannot leave the place of their abuse or these refuges are not endowed for what they need, women with disabilities must return to the atmosphere of violence.⁷⁵

Concerning children with disabilities, they are more vulnerable and unprotected in comparison to women. Kayhan Bahalı, a Turkish medical doctor, who with some others conducted a study to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of sexually abused children in Turkey, points out that, as in most eastern underdeveloped or developing countries, CSA had been neglected up to the mid-1990s. The North American experience has guided professionals in Turkey in dealing with CSA cases. Following the recognition of this issue, campaigns were formed to tackle CSA. Although Turkey endeavors to reach the standards of the developed world by solving this social wound, at present there is no national CSA prevention program in the country. Medical professionals are obliged to report cases of CSA to public prosecutor offices but not to child protective services, which are not common and not adequately functional. Punishment for sexual abuse is significantly increased if the victim's mental health is

⁷⁴ See İdil Seda Ak et al., eds., *Türkiye'de engelli kadına yönelik şiddet raporu 2013-2014* (Ankara: Engelli Kadın Derneği, 2014), 6.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 7.

impaired, according to the Turkish Penal Code. Thus, victims of severely abusive acts such as genital penetration are sent for psychiatric evaluation and medical support.⁷⁶ Public, professional, and governmental awareness of CSA is very low in Turkey, because physicians tend to treat only the presenting symptoms with limited legal and social intervention in cases of injuries, unless there is a third party asking for legal intervention, or mass media involvement. Perpetrators of physical abuse rarely get convicted. The greatest number of cases in which the offenders were tried criminally and received time in jail are those convicted of extra-familial rape. Rarely does a judge decide that a family needs social, educational, or medical support.⁷⁷

Bahalı's study was performed in the Çukurova region, which is located in the south of Turkey, along the Mediterranean coast, where my own roots are. The region has four big cities. It has a population of over 4.5 million and has been receiving a significant influx of migrants from rural areas. It follows that problems accompanying migration and socio-economic deprivation increase incidents of violence and all types of abuse. For example, the presence of a stepfather in the home, family conflicts, economic problems, and physical or mental disability in the child are significant risk factors for CSA. Consistent with this, some twenty-four percent of the victims were mentally retarded; CSA was higher in parents with a lower level of education.⁷⁸ On the other hand, another study conducted on fifty cases diagnosed and followed-up, showed that the offenders were an only father in thirty-eight percent, an only mother in twenty-eight percent, and both parents in thirty-four percent. More than three aforementioned CSA risk factors, among

⁷⁶ See Kayhan Bahalı et al., "Child Sexual Abuse: Seven Years in Practice," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 55/3 (2010): 634-635.

⁷⁷ See R. Oral et al., "Child Abuse in Turkey: An Experience in Overcoming Denial and a Description of 50 Cases," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 25/2 (2001): 280-281.

⁷⁸ Bahalı et al., "Child Sexual Abuse," 634-635.

them mental disabilities, were present in ninety-four percent. Sixteen percent were free of being abused again, and forty-two percent survived with handicaps.⁷⁹

Sezen Köse and her team found that that about thirty-five percent of children who were exposed to sexual abuse had some mental disabilities, and seventy-four percent of the perpetrators were acquaintances. Another significant datum to confirm the relationship between mental disabilities, familiarities, and abuses, comes from a study conducted on some cases of incest in Turkish society which shows that children with mental retardation are 4 to 10 times more vulnerable to victimization than nondisabled children. The fact that the people with mental retardation are often victims of sexual abuse is explained by factors such as the settled and unconditional trust they have for authority, the lack of social and emotional insecurity, the ignorance of sexuality, the need to be accepted, as well as their being in a socially weak position. Among them those who are fully dependent on their family or social and health professionals are prone to intimidation and to domination.⁸⁰

The sensitivity of the majority of Turkish society toward these issues is encouraging. However, expecting the government to resolve the issue with some law is not realistic. I believe that education of the people is particularly important. In this regard, men and women religious may have a significant role, especially in rural areas where these issues are mostly encountered and people are more inclined to be guided by religious dictates. That being said, a dialogue of life experiences and action based on these issues could have three levels:

⁷⁹ R. Oral et al., "Child Abuse in Turkey," 279.

⁸⁰ See Sezen Köse et al., "Bir eğitim ve araştırma hastanesi çocuk psikiyatrisi polikliniğine yönlendirilen adli olgular," *Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry* 12 (2011): 224, 221-225; Sefa Saygılı, Sinem Gönenli, "Aynı ailede görülen çoklu ensest," *Düşünen Adam* 21(1-4) 2008: 32-37; S. Korkut, B. Tüzün, "Ensest olgularının çocuğun konumu ve yasal hakları açısından değerlendirilmesi," *Adli Tıp Dergisi* 15/1 (2001): 30-36; S. Pincus, "Sexuality in the Mentally Retarded Patient," *Am Fam Physician* 32/2(1988): 319-323.

(1) Identification and recognition of the issues: Reflections and discussions starting from studies made regarding these phenomena, some of which were reported above, may be used. Listening to some scholars who made these studies, or in CSA cases and cases of violence against women with disabilities, to those who are involved in investigation or in their rehabilitation may also be necessary to illuminate men or women religious involved in dialogue. In this regard – where available – listening also to some men and women, or child victims of abuse and violence, and women who aborted their children because of some potential disabilities may be helpful to raise awareness among dialogue participants.

(2) Contribution to law enforcements and collaboration with authorities: Religious leaders who are more involved than law makers in the family related issues, as they are continuously in contact with people, can contribute to the preparation of laws by providing information to law-makers and to members of parliament about the attitudes of people regarding these social issues in their parish or mosque circles. Imams can refuse to celebrate marriages between young children and adults, mentally disabled people whom state laws would not allow to be married. In these cases, after refusing the marriage they also should follow up if some other imam celebrates that marriage, and even denounce such cases to competent authorities. This level of dialogue may be dedicated to discussions about these and other duties of religious personnel.

(3) At this level, men and women religious in dialogue can discuss and share the ways to reach people in order to educate them and to raise awareness. In chapter II I discussed the findings of Turkish scholar Kula's research about how PWD deal with their situations. One of the significant outcomes was that PWD want to understand their situation and strive to handle the problems they encounter. It follows that religion comes up as a significant source in helping PWD to evaluate and adjust to their situation and to solve their resulting problems. The main

reason for this is that religion provides PWD some information to understand themselves and their environment, and consequently to form a helpful life perspective. The lack of religious knowledge, indeed, has a crucial role in evaluating one's life and disability with a negative attitude. Therefore, as Kula pointed out, PWD may benefit from religious advice and spiritual guidance based on the knowledge that God is merciful and loveable, and the differences which exist among creatures are the fruits of God's providence rather than the results of God's punishment.⁸¹ It follows that pastoral letters issued by top religious leaders, proceedings of this and other interreligious dialogue encounters prepared or reviewed together may be helpful instruments. Furthermore, and most importantly, preaching on some Fridays in mosques, and on Sundays in churches dedicated to religious advice and spiritual guidance toward PWD can be part of these dialogue meetings.

As already pointed out, these three forms of dialogue are not separated one from the other but they are interconnected. Therefore, while discussing the education of respective believers and the content of preaching, some theological reflections may always have a necessary space. For instance, how we construct the "issue" of abortion, especially in the case of a potentially disabled child, may be considered as an interconnected topic, that is, it can be a topic both for theological dialogue and dialogue of life experiences and action. For example, as just mentioned, while introducing the topic of abortion as a method to prevent the birth of a potentially disabled child, some Turkish-Muslim scholars suggest that in the case where there is certainty that the quality of life and capabilities of a potential child to self-manage itself would be lesser than a "normal" child, the destiny of the fetus should be entrusted to decisions made by competent physicians. I

⁸¹ Mustafa Naci Kula, "Engellilere verilecek tebliğ ve irşad hizmeti," *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 4 (2004): 32-33.

find this position quite arguable, because if this kind of rationalization is extended it can lead, for instance, to the elimination of living mentally disabled children and adults.

The CC's position is much more clear in this regard which in a nutshell defines unborn children as the most defenseless and innocent among us, and recognizes that in the contemporary world "efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. Yet this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development." (EG 213). On the other hand, the position given as an example is not a unique Islamic position. There are others, among them Ghaly who holds that first of all every human being is God's creation and no one may play God and decide to terminate another human life. Secondly, happiness and the quality of life are subjective terms and no one should speak or decide for another.⁸² That having been said, a theological dialogue starting from abortion and based on the meaning of quality of life, the rights of unborn child and its parents, the responsibilities of healthcare providers, and the possibilities of conscientious objection, is possible. The possibility of a theological dialogue can be extended to the theological perspectives of the two religions on abortion, the legal and ethical status of fetus, the initiation of life, human dignity, human rights, prochoice and prolife decisions, and end-of-life issues.

c. Dialogue Based on Religious Life Experience

A form of dialogue which puts together religious life experiences such as prayer, contemplation, and meditation as well as spiritual outcomes of pastoral and charitable activities

⁸² Cf. Mohammed Ghaly, *Islam and Disability: Perspectives in Theology and Jurisprudence* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 123.

can offer different topics and levels of dialogue as well as collaboration opportunities. These topics range from charitable activities to organized prayers for and with PWD, and from volunteering in hospitals and health centers for PWD to eventual encounters where religious men and women share their experiences with PWD. In this instance and for this kind of dialogue as a topic I would like to propose a healthcare and charity based-collaboration. This topic may have three main possibilities:

(1) In the first place, participants of dialogue can reflect on healthcare and charity, how their respective religious traditions consider health, integrity of body and mind, their preservation and protection, their dignities; how their religions see charity, good deeds, alms. Just to give an example, giving charity in Islam is called in Arabic *sadaqa* (*sadaka* in Turkish) which comes from the word *sidq* (sincerity), i.e., it is a sign of sincerity of faith on the part of the person who gives it. Muslim believers are encouraged to give *sadaqa* to people in need. This is why it is not so unusual to see on the streets of Turkish cities, especially before mosques and churches, beggars with some disabilities or in many cases just pretending to have disabilities. Also Catholic believers are encouraged to give alms. Therefore, just this simple point can be a common ground on which to dialogue and to collaborate with the intention of seeking a cure for disease, or to improve the quality of life of PWD. Both the Quran and the Bible, as well as Muhammad's hadith, his successors' lifestyles, Jesus's healing encounters, those of his disciples and innumerable Catholic men and women saints and others' good deeds, charitable institutions, religious orders and fraternities founded and run by them may be a significant resource on which to reflect together in order to get new inspirations or encouragements for new initiatives.

(2) In the second place, participants of dialogue can verify together possibilities of collaboration, as this topic is more praxis-oriented, the participants aim at a common action. As

demonstrated in chapter three, especially in Istanbul and in Izmir there are already significant Christian charitable organizations, most of them involved in healthcare: Caritas, La Paix, Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program (IIMP), three facilities of health activities, namely, Artisan, Fransız Fakirhanesi, and Austrian Hospital of Saint George, along with the Armenians' Surp Pırgıç Hospital and ZİBEÇ. In these structures, the majority of people (patients and staff) are Muslim, and all these organizations open their doors to all people without any distinction based on religious belief or ethnicity. I find this characteristic very significant and inspiring for Muslim-Christian collaboration. On the other hand, the service launched by the Diyanet for Muslim people with hearing impairments, which consists of sermons with sign language, as well as the *Dictionary of Religious Concepts with the Turkish Sign Language* can offer further collaboration opportunities by trying to enrich these services with Christian terms. Furthermore, there are many other Muslim foundations which run similar charitable structures. For Muslim foundations to be a majority and therefore also have governmental support is a plus. Therefore, the real sense of this kind of collaboration would come up best when all political and ideological interests are put aside and resources are shared in view of a greater good for those in need. Dialogue activities putting these instruments at the center and taking distance from political and ideological agendas, aiming more to develop and perfect socio-cultural and spiritual bounds, are always to be welcomed.

In this regard, however, it is not so difficult to foresee some problems to face as a result of some prejudgments. In Turkey, services offered by Christian charitable organizations generally help not only Christians but everyone, and because of this openness are seen as proselytizing. It follows that Muslims joining this process feel themselves used for new projects that Christians

develop for daily life.⁸³ Therefore, once again, Christian partners of the dialogue need to explain clearly and convincingly the purpose and aims of their participation in the dialogue, so that they do not seem to use the dialogue as a “Trojan horse.”⁸⁴

(3) In the third place, I think praying together would be proposable even as we are aware of difficulties for both parties to pray together. Based on my personal experience, some Muslim participants in Muslim-Christian dialogue activities, when it comes to prayer, tend to skip it. These are discouraged by different interpretations of some verses in the Quran which dissuade them to pray together, and/or for Christians “who incur wrath [and] who are astray” (1:7). When Abraham spoke with the angels and tried to dissuade them from bringing destruction down upon the people of Lot, the Quran admonishes: “Truly Abraham was clement, tenderhearted, penitent. ‘O Abraham! Turn away from this. Truly the Command of thy Lord has come, and surely a punishment that cannot be repelled comes upon them’” (11:75-76). The same attitude is reserved for those who are kin but leave the way of God (cf. 9:113-114; 19:42-48).

As the presidents of the Diyanet have pointed out on various occasions and supported also by some Christian partners, the major ritual prayers such as *namaz* and the Eucharist celebrated together are not proposable, to which many agree.⁸⁵ Muslims during their *namaz* which they do together or alone, can certainly pray for dialogue, peace, and PWD. The same is valid also for Christians who during their Eucharist can dedicate some time and space for these prayers, but expecting participation of each other would not be so realistic, and would also create problems for believers. However, Christians and Muslims can still pray together without putting aside their identities and respecting fully their traditions, as it is stated by Kenneth Cragg, who was an

⁸³ See Alici, *Müslüman-Hıristiyan diyalogu*, 445-446.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 318.

⁸⁵ See pp. 72-73.

Anglican bishop and scholar of Muslim-Christian relations, “[i]t has to be possible to find forms of words and of worship in all such situations of mutual responsibility, to commend ourselves to wisdom higher than our own, to patience surer than ours, to zeal beyond our sustaining.”⁸⁶

A kind of liturgy of the word in order to pray through a topic, such as disability, with some readings, reciprocal homilies, intervals of silence, moments of sharing left to the discretion of participants is doable and I think would also be fruitful. The proposal and preparation of this moment of prayer should be shared, and each other’s sensitivities taken into account. Concerning the readings, difficult and provocative passages should be avoided; praying through some psalms where there are some shared points can help to pray together. Moreover, some passages of Jesus’ encounters with PWD along with those verses in the Quran narrating Jesus’ healing miracles, narratives taken by Muhammad’s hadith, poems of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, also known as Mevlânâ (1207-1273), a Sufi mystic, or of Yunus Emre (1238-1320), a Turkish poet and Sufi mystic who greatly influenced Anatolian culture, as well as the *Praises of God*⁸⁷ composed by Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/1182 – 1226), which is very close to the ninety-nine names of God in Islam known as the *’asmā’u- llāhi l-ḥusnā* and can be proposable for a common prayer, and acceptable by all as they give opportunity to share some sources of spiritual traditions. On the other hand, for the sake of ongoing dialogue, proposing or praying for the salvation of each other should be absolutely avoided.

⁸⁶ Kenneth Cragg, “Dialogue and Devotion,” in *Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths: Papers Presented at a Consultation Held at Ajaltoun, Lebanon, March 1970*, ed. Stanley J. Samartha (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973), 103.

⁸⁷ Francis composed this prayer of praise on Mount La Verna in September 1224, when he received the stigmata. The prayer was written on a parchment with the autographs of Francis and is conserved in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi. It reads as follows: “You are holy Lord God Who does wonderful things. You are strong. You are great. You are the most high. You are the almighty king. You holy Father, King of heaven and earth. You are three and one, the Lord God of gods; You are the good, all good, the highest good, Lord God living and true. You are love, charity; You are wisdom ...”

Concerning the place to pray, even though Muslims respect churches, since images and statutes inside of them constitute a problem, they do not want to be pushed to pray together in Christian worship places. According to Alici, Muslims praying in these places along with Christians are afraid to convert to Christianity as a result of some spiritual exchange. On the other hand, this issue is shared also by some Christians who do not always appreciate recitation of the Quran, or performance of *Mevlevi Sema* ceremonies in churches. Therefore, when these encounters are organized in order to overcome these difficulties and for the sake of dialogue these points should be taken into account.

C) Final Thoughts

In my research, I wanted to show firstly how, despite the magnitude of the issue, “both awareness of and scientific information on disability issues are lacking,”⁸⁸ and there is still a perfectible agreement on definitions, which also explains why so far a bioethical reflection has been virtually absent, with respect to issues related to disability. One can see easily that there is a whole series of barriers, which have made a satisfactory understanding of disability and PWD difficult. First of all, this subject has an objective complexity because disability has a multiplicity of forms from physical to mental, from sensory to behavioral and so on. Some of these can hardly be identified in a distinct way or may overlap. As mentioned, until the adoption of the UN Convention, there had not even existed a unanimous and agreed definition of disability, always subject to ongoing linguistic changes and the expression of different view on disability over the centuries.

⁸⁸ *World Report on Disability*, xxi.

Secondly, for a long time, especially in Turkey, disability was considered a taboo associated with dark and irrational situations. In the latest reports and surveys made in Turkey, which were brought out in the first chapter, the percentage of PWD who have become aware of their dignity as persons is slightly increasing. This is due to international and national movements and associations that have brought the issue of disability to public debate, and so pushed Turkish governments to make some efforts even if insignificant. Finally, the approach to disability has always been referred to a medical or welfare model, identifying the person with disabilities as a sick person who needed to be rehabilitated, cured, healed, or assisted. All this complexity of elements has hindered a comprehensive person- and dignity-based approach to disability.

The results of the aforementioned reports show that there is a need to take further actions to change negative attitudes toward PWD in order to ensure their full participation in society, and to raise awareness of the public regarding disability issues. A kind of awareness-raising program focused on the needs of persons who have different kinds of disability would certainly help to eradicate widespread barriers and prejudices against PWD as unproductive citizens in society.⁸⁹ These barriers and prejudices often come from and turn around a religiously colored cultural framework and can be overcome through sincere dialogue.

Apropos of dialogue, I have discussed how dialogue entered into the discourse of the CC and by reviewing relevant documents relating to interreligious dialogue, and more particularly to Muslim-Christian dialogue, from the Vatican II to today, I have highlighted the significant phases of perception of Vatican II's insights on dialogue in the post-Vatican II era. Right before Vatican II, Paul VI in *ES* pointed out that the dialogue is not a renunciation of the mission to bring Christ to the world, yet as Godself took the initiative in the dialogue of salvation we,

⁸⁹ See T.C. Başbakanlık Özürlüler İdaresi Başkanlığı, *Toplum özürlülüğü nasıl anlıyor?* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Özürlüler İdaresi, 2009), 193.

therefore, must be the first to ask for a dialogue with men and women. On the other hand, all magisterial documents recognize and repeat the principle of the unique mediation of Jesus Christ. Even if we admit the possibility of salvation outside the Church, this does not imply the possibility of salvation outside of Christ. In this sense, the *RM*, and *DP* state that the Church is necessary for salvation and is the ordinary way of salvation. Moreover, another expression that unites the Church and salvation, often occurring in the documents, is that the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation.

Regarding the other religions, no documents state they are ways of salvation; Church and other religions are never placed on the same plane. The relation that other religions have to salvation is not the same as that established by the Church. The salvific value present in religions is not granted in the generic sense, but always and only with reference to what is good in them. This recognition of positive elements in the religions became a constant in the magisterial documents of the last decade as I have highlighted through the post-synodal apostolic exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa*, and *Ecclesia in Asia*, in which the so-called traditional or indigenous religions are recognized as a preparation for the Gospel.

Dialogue does not consist only in the dialogue of theological exchange but more broadly embraces four interconnected forms, that is, dialogue of life, action, religious experience and theological exchange. A solid, established identity, openness to others, willingness to listen and to respect differences are common points shared by John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. The specificity of interreligious dialogue is not limited to the forms of life and action, but recognizes that the dialogue of knowledge has an important role, because it requires a clear exposition of

our respective religious tenets and a knowledge, which is the outcome of “a sincere exchange between friends,” who do not have fear of differences and who appreciate commonalities.⁹⁰

While especially in the teaching of John Paul II the communion of all men and women, by virtue of their universal bond with Christ, receives a special emphasis, Benedict XVI, by combining interreligious dialogue with intercultural dialogue, recognized religions’ connection with the culture. Recognizing the importance of culture and education in interreligious dialogue, Francis sees the future in “respectful co-existence in diversity,” and therefore, the recognition of the fundamental right to religious freedom in all its facets gains importance. Nevertheless, and somewhat contradictorily, dialogue among different religions in general is not an easy activity, and nowadays “an increasing number of voices within the CC are skeptical about, or even hostile to, Muslim-Christian dialogue, and there seems a real risk that many of the gains of recent decades will be lost in this hardening of positions.”⁹¹

Furthermore, my research showed that dialogue between Islam and the CC in Turkey is particularly difficult, especially in this very moment of its history. As has been seen, the Republic of Turkey, considered commonly as a bridge between West and East, and founded on the ruins of a seven-hundred-year-old Muslim Empire, from its foundation to today has struggled to find its identity by constantly swinging between an exasperated secularism and a repressed religiosity that in recent decades ends up strongly menacing its future and creating problems for its citizens, its own minorities as well as countries that surround it. In the first chapter I showed the drastic diminishing of the local Christian communities, and while all this was happening, how the relationship between Turkey and the Vatican has recently developed. The apostolic

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, “Incontro con il presidente del Direttorato degli Affari Religiosi,” in *Servitori della pace: viaggio apostolico in Turchia (28 Novembre – 1 Dicembre 2006)*, (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), 8.

⁹¹ Madigan, “Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Difficult Times,” 57.

visits of four popes, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, are not only milestones of this fragile relationship, but they also show how the CC considers Turkey a significant partner of Muslim-Christian dialogue. These visits and encounters with the presidents of the Diyanet, a controversial governmental-religious institution, have always been an occasion to confirm the good intentions of both parties, Vatican and Diyanet, to pursue more deeply a Muslim-Christian dialogue based on “truth and inspired by a sincere wish to know one another better, respecting differences and recognizing what they have in common,”⁹² and “seeking always to reject misunderstanding while promoting cooperation and concord.”⁹³

Not only the inevitable partiality of the Diyanet given its dependence on the government, but also the accusations against Gülen and his Hizmet Movement, for decades a partner in Muslim-Christian dialogue, showed how this desired dialogue sometimes navigates into unpredictable waters. Given the difficulties of Christian minorities in the country, even though the desire of religious orders engaged in small-scale Muslim-Christian dialogue activities to distance themselves and bring the dialogue into still waters is understandable, this attitude remains questionable. The Church in Turkey, because of fear and “prudence,” has always been present and non-present at the same time, a Church of foreigners and Christians of non-Turkish origin because of its incapacity to inculturate. Moreover, the difficulty of the Turkish language and a challenging and unsatisfactory religious life mean that religious are also often highly mobile. Therefore, it is hard to build a truly “local” Church, given the time required for genuine enculturation. The current clergy is aging and hence sending young people to Turkey is difficult because living as a religious in this country is very challenging for a number of reasons and

⁹² Benedict XVI, “Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate.”

⁹³ Francis, “Address of the Holy Father to the Turkish President.”

therefore requires “mature” people who have reached a human and spiritual balance.⁹⁴ All this affects the continuity of Muslim-Christian dialogue activities; in many cases they remain tied to a single person, and when he or she leaves the country the dialogue is done.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, a considerable part of Turkish Muslim or nationalist scholars see the CC’s Muslim-Christian dialogue commitment as missionary activity, therefore to be firmly rejected or at least to be taken prudently into account. Consulting the Turkish literature about interreligious dialogue with other religions in general and with the CC in particular I found that most authors have a negative attitude toward interreligious dialogue, and this attitude is expressed in terms of suspicion, distrust, reluctance, and accusations of proselytism. The CC is seen as a very well-founded, solidly structured institution which has a quite respectable experience and tradition in Muslim-Christian dialogue. This observance along with the competency of Christian partners of dialogue in terms of theological, philosophical, and positive scientific knowledge, and linguistic skills, discourages Muslim partners from being involved in any dialogue activities since most of them feel themselves not quite at that level. All these factors raise serious questions about Muslim-Christian dialogue initiatives in Turkey, their effectivity, and their future. At the end of the day, there is a risk that the ongoing dialogue will result in such a “dialogue of the deaf” as is said in Turkish (*sağırlar arası diyalog*) that it goes nowhere.

Along with these difficulties which certainly have their roots in the complex history of relationships between Islam and the Christian world in general, and between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, there are also religious convictions coming from the Quran and other main sources of Islam. For the Quran, Christianity is no longer that religion “sent” by God to the

⁹⁴ See Jean-Marc Balhan, S.J. “La Chiesa Cattolica Latina nella Turchia di oggi: spargere semi di senape a tutti i venti,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3971/4 (December 12, 2015): 472-478.

“prophet” Jesus, and the Gospel is not the same but a falsified version of its perfect version.⁹⁵

The fact that Christians do not share the view that Islam is the last and the perfect religion creates problems for Muslims. Some instances in the Quran speak of those who refused to embrace Islam and continued to hold to their wrong beliefs about Jesus and so are considered liars and are challenged with a “curse” (cf. 3:61). These verses are interpreted by some as “psychological pressure” to abandon dialogue or not to be engaged at all when there is no possibility to invite others to review one’s beliefs, to change one’s position, and to help one to find the truth.⁹⁶

Whereas, as Choan-Seng Song, a Protestant Taiwanese theologian highlights, “genuine interreligious dialogue is not so much a communication technique as it is a multi-stage process of conversion for those involved.”⁹⁷ If both Muslim and Christian parties to dialogue activities in Turkey could agree that the conversion in question is not to convert one to another’s religion but is an outcome to reach together through an authentic dialogue aimed at discovery of the truth, there would be no reason to be afraid or to leave the dialogue.

The Turkish-Muslim scholars also criticize themselves, and accuse each other of not having awareness of their responsibilities because, being so involved in Muslim-Christian dialogue, they represent not only themselves but most importantly Islam. They also accuse some of their fellows of not being prepared about the common nature of the dialogue and its theoretical foundations. In this regard, a further accusation is made against those who do not put aside their

⁹⁵ Köylü, *Dinler arası diyalog*, 141-142.

⁹⁶ Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 417.

⁹⁷ James. T. Bretzke, S.J. “Jesuits and Interreligious Dialogue. Conversion to Interreligious Dialogue: A Duty within the Church’s Mission,” last modified April 9, 2004, http://groups.creighton.edu/sjdialogue/documents/articles/njn_bretzke.html. In this article, referring to Song’s “bi-lateral cease-fire,” Bretzke argues that, once those involved in the dialogue stop trying to conquer the other side by converting them and agree to a theological armistice, then they might reach the next crucial stage of “blessed ignorance,” in which parties recognize that their religious-cultural experiences are not the sum of all possible truth. Accepting this results also in acceptance of the fact that both parties “might have something to contribute to the mutual search for the splendor of the truth.”

personal, communitarian, and ideological interests, rather than working for the interests of the Muslim community and particularly for the interest of the Turkish nation; instead they should dialogue only under equal circumstances and should never have a passive presence in dialogue activities.⁹⁸ Fethullah Gülen and his network can be placed as a subject of this latter criticism. Many of Turkish-Muslim authors were already criticizing him and his network for putting at the center of Muslim-Christian dialogue activities his personal, communitarian, and ideological interests as well as for talking in the name of Islam without being recognized by anyone in this mission. Criticized or not, supported or not, until July 15, 2016 or better until “the 7/15” of Turkey on which a failed coup attempt happened, he and his network were major interlocutors of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey. Also the Diyanet was, and still is, a partner of dialogue. However, as the studies on statements, speeches, and documents issued by the Diyanet and its presidents showed, the Diyanet has always been more at the side of those who were reluctant.

This is why in the context of contemporary Turkey these two words, “interreligious dialogue” and all their derivatives are already banned. Proposing or talking about Muslim-Christian dialogue in today’s Turkey means either discrimination or persecution. No one in Turkey after 7/15 dared to write scholarly papers about Muslim-Christian dialogue unless to accuse Gülen and his network and so to try to exculpate themselves or inculpate some others. Some Turkish authors whose studies were consulted for this research, among them universally known academic İftar Gözaydın, are still in prison. Moreover, the Latin Catholic Church, Franciscans, Capuchins, Dominicans, and Jesuits present in Turkey have stopped their Muslim-Christian dialogue activities until further notice, and honestly their activities were not necessarily sympathetic to Gülen and his network.

⁹⁸ Alıcı, *Müslüman-Hristiyan diyalogu*, 418-419.

That being said, as regards this research, immediately after 7/15, following the accusations against Gülen, and the purge started by the Turkish government, I had some doubts whether it was prudent or not to work academically on this topic. Therefore, I needed to do a discernment, and at the end, based on following main reasons I decided to proceed: (1) The proposal for this research and its topic was prepared, presented, and accepted much before 7/15. When the coup attempt happened I was already working on this research. (2) The research is not merely about Gülen and his movement. It is primarily about Muslim-Christian dialogue through a particular topic which is disability and PWD. (3) I mentioned him and his network among many other institutions, people, and subtopics related to Muslim-Christian dialogue. His efforts throughout the last decades in Muslim-Christian dialogue are significant, and his thoughts about PWD are relevant for a research of this kind focused on Muslim-Christian dialogue in the context of Turkey. It follows that without mentioning or ignoring him this research would not have been academically complete. (4) I am not his supporter; I have never been. As a secularist Turkish citizen, instead, I believe in a laic, democratic Turkey as desired by our founder Atatürk. Therefore, I also believe in freedom of thought, of speech, and academic freedom, and relying especially on the latter, I present this research as a humble contribution to the ongoing academic reflections on Muslim-Christian dialogue and disability.

Gülen's example should be relevant for all as it shows how slippery is the ground on which we have been dialoging in Turkey with our Muslim brothers and sisters. Most of the points I touched on in my research regarding Muslim-Christian dialogue in Turkey are affected by politics, ideologies, and nationalistic positions which come up so powerfully to suppress theological, ethical, and most importantly humanitarian aspects of Muslim-Christian dialogue. As a member of the CC I believe it is necessary to point out once again that Muslim-Christian

dialogue was not started by Gülen. In the contemporary sense that is given to interreligious dialogue, as this research has shown, it started with *ES*, Vatican II and by the CC, and it has its roots since the beginning of Christianity. Political situations and historical conditions are susceptible of continuous changes. However, from my point of view, the teaching of the CC remains. Therefore, all should continue “scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (*GS* 4) and keep open the doors of dialogue with others.

The dialogue with our Muslim brothers and sisters cannot be stopped until further notice and under any conditions. Christians have been “living the truth in love” (Eph 4:15) for centuries in order “to give an explanation to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for [our] hope” (1 Pt 3:15). We do so by dialoging “with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pt 3:16) for the greater glory of God, and so, to reach major benefits for those in need with whom we share the same dignity derived from being created by God with love in God’s likeness and image. Among those who are in need there are PWD and their families to whom I dedicated this research. Even though in the final analysis, this research emphasized the difficulties of Muslim-Christian dialogue in contemporary Turkey, I am lifted up by the findings coming from the comparison I made between Muslim and the CC’s perspectives on disability and PWD.

Islam wants that Muslims treat vulnerable persons including PWD with humility, protecting them, helping those who need help and support, sharing their sorrows, and working to provide calm and peace. The Quran, which measures responsibility in proportion to men’s and women’s abilities, provides many facilitations and permissions to PWD for their religious duties, and through these provisions removes any negative attributions that people might attach to PWD, and so provides for their inclusion into social life. Parallel to the Quran, Muhammad, by treating PWD with charity, employing them, providing for them many easements and inviting his

followers to do the same, strengthened Islam's attitude toward PWD. In other words, the Muslim perspective does not give any space to a kind of "othering" or exclusion of PWD: "one's relationship with others is part of one's relationship with God such that one must use it as a way of drawing near to God in an ever-increasing act of perfecting."⁹⁹ The positive reverberations of these positions are seen also in various provisions of Islamic law, and the attitudes of top Turkish religious leaders are encouraging:

Every human being has an inherent value and this value derives from being born as a human being. Human beings are honorable, have the right to resolve their needs in a manner that is respectful of their dignity. Although they need support, it does not hinder our disabled brothers and sisters to embrace life and hope. Because being a human signifies deserving an unhindered life.¹⁰⁰

Concerning the Catholic perspective, Jesus, son of God, incarnated in the fragility of humankind encounters those who are most vulnerable, shows them compassion and love without denying at any time their dignity. The CC in the footsteps of its founder and Lord in its mission, teaching, and provisions endeavors to prevent their exclusion from the Church and society. In the words of Bishop Rubén Tierrablanca, apostolic vicar of Istanbul, the Church in the practice of the faith, is called to be careful and to be ready to offer fraternal service of help and accompaniment to PWD:

Beyond altruistic feelings and the common sense of humanity, vision and understanding of the person in our faith and practice of religion have their origin and inspiration in the person

⁹⁹ Lynne M. Bejoian et al., "Disability, Agency, and Engagement: Three Wisdom Traditions' Call to Be Radically Available," in *Disability and Religious Diversity: Cross-Cultural and Interreligious Perspectives*, ed. Darla Schumm, Michael Stoltzfus (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 192.

¹⁰⁰ "Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Görmez'den engellilere mektup," May 9, 2015, www.diyamet.gov.tr.

of Jesus Christ who makes the blind to see, the deaf hear and the lame to walk, sends his disciples to proclaim the new life; the announcement is not only of words, but of life and health: ‘cure the sick [who will find you]’ (cf. Lk 10:9).¹⁰¹

These words of the president of the Diyanet’s Mehmet Görmez and Istanbul’s Bishop Rubén Tierrablanca that I wanted to highlight at the end of my research show the evolution of terminology and categories used both in the Bible and in the Quran to define PWD and this is encouraging and gives hope for the future. However, I believe that this positive development and opening toward our brothers and sisters with disabilities and their inclusion at all levels of our lives needs to be pushed tirelessly. Bishop Tierrablanca points out that one of the first things that foreigners who visit or live in Turkey notice often when they go by means of public transport (bus, metro, boat) is the sensitivity and respect of Turkish people who offer a seat to a PWD or elderly person. He adds, “the Turks maintain a high sense of humanity in everyday relations. Cultural values regarding humanitarian aid are, indeed, common points on which we can share efforts and cooperation among religions to create a new society of peaceful coexistence.”¹⁰² As a Turkish-Christian citizen I rely on this “high sense of humanity” of my fellow citizens and I believe firmly that the way to create a new society of peaceful coexistence passes through a sincere and authentic dialogue based on mutual respect, trust, acceptance, and a shared desire to reach together *veritatis splendor*. With my research I hope to contribute to this mutual search not only in Turkey but everywhere in the world where disabled or nondisabled, Muslim or Christian our steps may cross.

¹⁰¹ Bishop Rubén Tierrablanca, O.F.M., e-mail message to author, March 14, 2017.

¹⁰² Ibid.

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