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The Promise of Renewal
Dominicans and Vatican II

edited by
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Table of Contents

Introduction
1. Editors’ Introduction
   ix
2. Adresse au Colloque de Toronto :
   Vatican II and the Promise of Renewal
   Bruno Cadore, Master of the Order
   of Preachers, Rome
   xv

Section A
Liturgy in Context
3. From Latin to Norwegian: ‘Inculturation’ in language and music?
   A Dominican Enterprise
   Else-Britt Nilsen, Lecturer, Norwegian
   School of Theology
   3

4. Music and the Prayer of Praise:
   Liturgical Music According to Frank Quinn, O.P.
   Marcos A Ramos, University of St Michael’s College
   Monastery of the Infant Jesus, Texas
   19

5. New Liturgical Space for a Renewed Liturgy
   Peter Spichtig, Leiter des Liturgischen Instituts der
   deutschsprachigen Schweiz
   31
### Section B
#### Ecclesiological Renewal

6. Beyond Hierarchiology: Congar, Pope Francis and the Council's Unfinished Liberation of Ecclesiology
   - _Gerard Mannion, Joseph and Winifred Amaturo_  
   - Chair in Catholic Studies, Georgetown University  
   - 47

   - _Stanley Azaro, Connecticut_  
   - 75

### Section C
#### Future Directions in Religious Life

8. Les dominicains aux prises avec Vatican II. Un milieu en mouvement dans un monde et une Église en transition
   - _Gilles Routhier, Doyen, Université Laval_  
   - 97

   - _Kathleen McManus, Associate Professor, Systematic Theology, University of Portland_  
   - 123

    - _Jason Zuidema, Assistant Professor, Concordia University_  
    - 141

### Section D
#### Aquinas at and Beyond Vatican II

11. Vatican II and Thomist Revivalism: Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Lonergan on the 'Dialectic of History'
    - _Nicholas Olkovitch, Assistant Professor, Director of Field Education and Pastoral Formation, Faculty of Theology, University of St Michael's College_  
    - 159

### Section E
#### Early Inter-Religious Encounters

12. Can We Still Speak of a Psychological Analogy After Vatican II?
    - _Michael Attridge and Darren Dias, Associate Professors, Systematic Theology_  
    - Faculty of Theology, University of St Michael's College  
    - 183

13. Trinitarian Elements in a Theology of Religion: A Tribute to Frederick E Crowe
    - _Robert M Doran, Emmet Doerr Chair in Catholic Systematic Theology_  
    - Marquette University  
    - 203

    - _Dennis Hafiz, Free University, Berlin Institut_  
    - dominican d'études orientales, Cairo  
    - 225

15. Les dominicains du Caire et l'évolution du regard sur l'islam à Vatican II
    - _Jean Jacques Pérennès, Directeur, Ecole biblique et archeologique francaise de Jerusalem_  
    - 241

16. From _Le Saucchoir to Nostra Aetate_
    - _Minlib Dallh, Candler School of Theology, Emory University_  
    - 257

17. Some German Dominicans and the so-called 'Jewish Question'
    - _Elias H Füllenbach, Institut zur Erforschung der Geschicte Des Dominikanerordens im deutschen Sprachraum, Cologne_  
    - 275
18. Père Bruno Hussar: un Prophète du Dialoge Judéo-chrétien et un des pères du quatrième paragraphe de Nostra Aetate

Claudio Monge, Dominican Study Institute of Istanbul

Section F
Dignity and the Common Good

19. From the Docks of Marseille to Vatican II: The Pivotal Role of the Dominican Worker-Priests (1942–1965)
Oscar Cole-Arnal, Professor Emeritus, Wilfred Laurier University

20. L’apport d’Yves Congar à la rédaction de la déclaration sur la liberté religieuse de Vatican II
Alessandro Cortesi, Theological Faculty of Center Italy (FTIC)

21. Deus Migrator/God The Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration
Peter C Phan, Ellacuría Chair in Catholic Social Thought Georgetown University

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Introduction
Michael Attridge, Darren Dias OP,
Matthew Eaton, Nicholas Olkovich

The essays in this volume emerged from a conference held in May 2015 at the University of St Michael’s College in Toronto, Canada. The year 2015 marked not only the 800th anniversary of the Dominican Order’s founding it also represented the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s closing. The overlapping of these two milestones provided a fortuitous opportunity for exploring connections that historians of Vatican II are not unaware of but that have never before been foregrounded in such an explicit fashion. Dominicans played an integral role before, during and after the Council. Members of the Order were involved in retrieving and shaping historical and theological insights and resources that would inform some of the Council’s most important theological debates giving rise to some of its most exciting developments. The role of Dominicans was essential in the post-conciliar reception and implementation of its many reforms and significant themes. To celebrate the intersection of these two anniversaries, the Dominican Institute of Toronto and the Institute for Research on the Second Vatican Council in Canada invited scholars to submit papers for presentation. The resulting conference brought together individuals from across the globe as well as members of the broader academic community to reflect on the Dominican charism, the Order’s relation to the Council and its role in the contemporary world. The essays in this collection are the fruit of these reflections and conversations. They include both English and French contributions.

The volume begins with the opening address offered by Bruno Cadore, Master of the Order of Preachers. In it he places two Councils in relief: Lateran IV and Vatican II, the former as the context for the
Towards a New Perception of Islam: 
The Influence of Marie-Dominique Chenu’s 
Theology of Incarnation on Christian-Muslim 
Relations 

Dennis Halft OP

When, on 20 October 1962, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council assembled for their first session, they began with a programmatic declaration to all humanity. In the so-called ‘Message to the World’, the Council Fathers called for a spiritual renewal of the Church. They invited Christians and non-Christians alike to work together for peace, unity, and social justice. The declaration thus foreshadowed the basic intention of the Council, which sought a positive and collaborative relationship between the Church and the world.

Chenu: Pioneer of a Renewed Church-World Relation

The initiator of this message and author of the ‘Message to the World’s first draft was French Dominican theologian and historian Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895–1990). In a draft of the document,


Chenu expresses his hope for a new theological appreciation of the realities in the world: "We are exiting prehistory: The world exists. Such is the great originality of the Council compared with the First Vatican Council [. . .]. The Church of the twentieth century [. . .] has to engage jointly her faith, her hope, her good works in this building of fraternal humanity."

Although Chenu was a renowned medievalist with strong ties to the institutes of medieval studies in Canada (Ottawa, later Montreal, and Toronto), theologians are quick to associate him with his direct contribution to the redaction of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et spes. Chenu combined the methods of historical contextualization and theological reflection in his approach to a wide range of studies. In addition to his important work on scholasticism and the writings of Thomas Aquinas, in particular Introduction à l'étude de saint Thomas d'Aquin (1950; English transl. A. M. Landry and D Hughes, 1964), La théologie comme science au XIXe siècle (1957), and St Thomas d'Aquin et la théologie (1959; English translation by P Philibert, 2002), Chenu was interested in contemporary theological questions, such as the concerns of the French priest-worker movement of which he became an intellectual leader.

The wide spectrum of Chenu's interests is grounded in his concept of a continued incarnation of the Word of God that encompasses history and time. The beginnings of his thinking date back to the 1920s, when Chenu became an instructor of the history of Doctrines in the Dominican house of studies, Le Saulchoir near Tournai in Belgium. In 1932, as he was appointed rector of the studium, Chenu reflected in his opening lecture on the method of theological study. Five years later, a revised version of his lecture was published under the title Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir (1937). Soon after its publication, the Holy Office placed Chenu's programmatic tract on the index of prohibited books (1942). As a result, the Dominican lost his teaching positions at Le Saulchoir and was assigned by his provincial to Rouen, France. Despite the significance of Chenu's theology, for the Council and beyond, the Dominican theologian was never officially rehabilitated by the Church.

What were the reasons for Chenu's condemnation? In his tract, the author suggests an ecclesiological approach based on a dynamic notion of revelation. Since God is incarnated in a historical event, the act of incarnation is perpetual in the realities of the world. Chenu argues that God is continuously manifesting himself in time and in history. His optimism towards humanity is grounded in a deep spirituality that is part of what the German theologian Ulrich Engel calls a 'Dominican Theology of Incarnation.' Following the sixteenth-century Dominican Melchior Cano, Chenu interprets the existing realities in the world as theological sources, so-called loci theologici in actu, from which a valid theological argument can be made.

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8. On 15 June 2004, Chenu symbolically received a posthumous honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, Germany. The honorary doctorate had been offered to Chenu in the late 1940s, but he declined for fear of potential repercussions and the condemnation of the Faculty. See Ulrich Engel, 'Posthummer Dr. h.c.' für M-D Chenu OP. Ermittlung an einen 'Theologen der Zeichen der Zeit', Wort und Antwort 45 (2004): 131.

derived. Among the identified localities, Chenu explicitly mentions three fields that touch upon Christian-Muslim relations, namely 'the pluralism of human cultures' (le pluralisme des civilisations humaines), 'the Near and Middle Eastern Christians' (les chrétiens locaux), and ‘Islam’. Far from being complete, this list symbolises an underlying principle that can be extended to other realities of the world, which are significant in better understanding the incarnate Word of God.

In an interview on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Chenu still emphasized the importance of the theology of continued incarnation. Given God's immanence in this world, its different religious and cultural faces are theological sources for the Church and, consequently, should be an object of our studying and learning. The model of incarnation can thus be applied to different historical situations. As the Canadian theologian Christophe F. Potworowski has put it, 'Chenu's commitment to the concreteness of history - or, better, to the historicity of human knowing—is most clearly expressed in his view of theology as a reading of the signs of the times'.

In what follows, I highlight the pivotal role of Chenu's 'theology of openness toward the world' (théologie d'ouverture au monde) in renewing Catholic theological perceptions of Islam. Below, I demonstrate that Chenu's thinking had either a direct or an indirect influence on Christian-Muslim relations in three historical contexts. First, in the foundation of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo (L'Institut dominicain d'études orientales du Caire) in the 1940s. Second, in the inclusion of Islam in the doctrinal teachings of the Second Vatican Council, namely in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium, and in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra aetate. Finally, in the present position of the Order of Preachers, the Dominicans, towards Christian-Muslim dialogue, evidenced in the General Chapters of the last decades.

The Foundation of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies

Chenu's efforts for a theological paradigm shift that would open the Church to other religions is most visible in his role in the foundation of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies, an institute based in Cairo that is dedicated to the study of the Arabo-Islamic culture. As a specialist of thirteenth century historical theology, Chenu was well aware of the intellectual influence of medieval Arab philosophers on scholastic theologians, especially its role in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. For a contextualization of Aquinas's thinking, it was important to study the works of Avicenna (980–1037) and Averroës (1126–98) and to identify their role in the transmission of Greek philosophy to Europe. Since Chenu did not read Arabic, he encouraged his students at Le Saulchoir in the 1930s to study the language. These students and later founding members of the Institute

12. The criteria for identifying these loci theologici in actu, however, must be specified. Chenu understood his approach as 'a hermeneutical principle of discernment with regard to specific historical situations' rather than 'a system'. See Potworowski, Contemplation and Incarnation, xv.
in Cairo were Georges Chehata Anawati (1905–94), Jacques Monier (1914–2008), and Serge de Laugier de Beaurecueil (1917–2005).²⁰

In Chenu’s view, the establishing of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies was the realization of the mission of the Order in a concrete *locus theologicus in actu* in an Islamic society.²¹ The friars would live among Muslims and study Islam on the basis of its primary sources in Arabic. Cairo as the intellectual center of the Arab world with its important Azhar University appeared to be the appropriate place.²² Following his journey to Egypt in 1938, Chenu described in a letter to his provincial his vision of the future institute, stating that ‘the whole purpose and meaning of the project is certainly not to go out and conquer Islam nor to convert some individuals here or there who are thereby separated from the Muslim community, but to dedicate oneself to intensive studies on Islam, its doctrine, and its contribution to culture [. . .].’²³ A revised version of Chenu’s letter became the founding charter of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in 1945.²⁴

Chenu’s efforts in the foundation of the Cairo institute coincided with the interests of the Vatican to foster the study of Islam and, thus, to widen the Church’s knowledge about other religions. The Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the French Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1884–1972), requested the Dominican General Chapter of Rome in September 1938 in a ‘secret message’ to prepare a team of friars for the study of questions on Muslim belief.²⁵ As Chenu relates, Tisserant asked for a purely scientific mission while living among Muslims.²⁶ This episode shows that the Church’s perspective on Islam began to change in the 1930s, long before it culminated in the teaching documents of the Second Vatican Council.

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²³ For the founding charter, see Morelon, ‘L’IDEO du Caïre’, 138–139.


With the foundation of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies, Chenu's vision of a Dominican presence among Muslims with the aim of holistically studying the Arabo-Islamic heritage was realized. Considering the tradition of Dominican friars in the encounter with Muslims since the thirteenth century, this field of study seemed an almost natural vocation for Anawati and others. Throughout his life, Chenu considered a presence of Dominicans among Muslims as 'one of the most important things to hold on to' ('l'une des choses les plus importantes à tenir'). After his death in 1990, the friars in Cairo lauded Chenu as their pioneer. In their obituary, they affirmed that 'our Institute owes its foundation and direction to him [Chenu] [. . .], as one of the many intellectual and religious dimensions of the brilliance of this man.'

The Inclusion of Islam in the Doctrinal Teachings of the Council

The year 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of Nostra aetate, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. Despite doctrinal differences, the episcopal magisterium had expressed in 1965 its theological position towards other religions as characterized by a positive attitude and the search for new ways of dialogue, understanding, and collaboration. Although the Declaration comprises only five rather short paragraphs, it was among the documents that attracted the most public attention, inside and outside the Church. Considering the different stages during the Council sessions and intersessions between 1963 and 1965 that led to the emergence of a separate declaration—not only on the Jews but also on the Muslims and other religions—Nostra aetate was 'one of the final surprises of the Second Vatican Council.'

Muslims are explicitly mentioned in Nostra aetate 3 as well as in the Dogmatic Constitution Lumen gentium 16C. In these passages, the Church expresses 'a high regard for the Muslims' (NA 3), their belief, and worship. Despite some shortcomings—for example, the Council avoids expressing any view on the interrelationship of Jesus and the role of Muhammad in Islam—it is no exaggeration to state that the documents mark a turning point in the Church's perception of

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27. See Morelon, 'In Memoriam', 526.


30. Nostra aetate 3 reads as follows: 'The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting. Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.'

In Lumen gentium 16C the Church acknowledges that 'the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day.'
Muslim belief.\textsuperscript{31} They open a new perspective that enables Christians and Muslims 'to achieve mutual understanding' and to 'preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values' (NA 3).

As we know, Chenu did not contribute to the redaction of the Council documents on Islam. However, it is argued here that his 'theology of openness toward the world' inspired the Council's teaching in relation to Muslim faith through the contribution of his former student Anawati. As the director of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo, Anawati was present in Rome during the Council meetings. With a lecture entitled \textit{L'Islam à l'heure du Concile. Prologèmes à un dialogue islam-chrétien} held at the Angelicum University in November 1963 in the presence of several Council Fathers, Anawati helped to put Islam on the agenda of the Council.\textsuperscript{32} This was particularly welcomed by the Council Fathers from the Near and Middle East (who wanted to counterbalance the emphasis elsewhere on Judaism).

Moreover, Anawati was directly involved in the redaction of \textit{Nostra aetate} 3 and \textit{Lumen gentium} 16C.\textsuperscript{33} Being one of two 'experts,' Anawati was appointed a member of the subcommittee on Islam by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.\textsuperscript{34} Together with the French White Father Robert Caspar (1923–2007), Anawati was entrusted with drafting the passages on Islam.\textsuperscript{35} In his report to the Council Fathers on the preparation of the Declaration later called \textit{Nostra aetate} at the end of the 8th General Congregation of the third Council session on 25 September 1964, the president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the German Cardinal Augustin Bea (1881–1968), explicitly thanked the White Fathers in Tunisia and the Dominicans in Cairo for their contribution.\textsuperscript{36}

While Anawati was working on the Council's textual passages on Islam, Chenu outlined the broader contours of the Church-world relation, as expressed in the Pastoral Constitution \textit{Gaudium et spes}. Despite his condemnation, Chenu was also present in Rome as theological advisor to Bishop Claude Rolland, a Council Father from Madagascar and former student at Le Saulchoir. Thus, Chenu directly influenced the Council's definition of a new relationship of the Church with the world by drafting the corresponding chapter for \textit{Gaudium et spes}.\textsuperscript{37} The German theologian Christian Bauer therefore called Chenu 'a crucial background actor' (zentrale Randfigur) of the Council.\textsuperscript{38}

Besides his involvement in the redaction of the Pastoral Constitution, Chenu continued to be in constant conversation with Council Fathers, theologians and Muslim observers on matters of...


\textsuperscript{33} For details, see Avon, \textit{Les Frères prêcheurs}, 777–807.

\textsuperscript{34} Johannes Oesterreicher, 'Kommentierende Einleitung zur Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zu den nichtchristlichen Religionen,' in \textit{LThK'}, Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, 2:406–478, here 450. For other members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity who were involved in the drafting of the Declaration, among them the Belgian Dominican and later cardinal Jean Jérôme Hamer (1916–96), see Avon, \textit{Les Frères prêcheurs}, 780, 783–784; Bormans, 'L'émersion de la Déclaration', 40–41.


\textsuperscript{36} Referring to the second part of the Declaration, which was intended to be appended to the scheme about ecumenism at the time, Bea stated as follows: \'Il est fait explicitement mention des Musulmans, comme de nombreux Pères l'avaient demandé. Nous pourrons dire que, sur ce point, le texte a plu aux experts, spécialement aux Dominicans de l'Institut du Caire pour les études orientales et aux Pères Blancs de l'Institut pontifical pour les études orientales, en Tunisie' (Augustin Bea, \"La déclaration sur les juifs et les non-chrétiens\", \textit{La Documentation catholique}, no 1435, 1 November 1964: 1421–1428, here 1425).


\textsuperscript{37} See Quinsinsky, \textit{Geschichtlicher Glaube}, 231–249; Eggersperger and Engel, \textit{Mutig in die Zukunft; Bauer, Ortswechsel der Theologie}.

\textsuperscript{38} Bauer, \textit{Marie-Dominique Chenu OP}, 121.
Islam. As Rolland relates, ‘during his free time, he [Chenu] […] attended, for instance, the meetings of the representatives or the experts on Islam in Rome, long before the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions was even founded [in 1967].’40 Another former student of Chenu, the Dominican Jacques Jomier, recalled in 1964 that his teacher had already talked about most of the concerns of the Council, such as the dialogue with non-Christians, in Le Saulchoir in the 1930s.41

Thus, Chenu’s pleading for a new relationship of the Church with the world and, in particular, with Islam and other religions appears to have influenced a whole generation of Dominican friars. These friars shaped not only the Council’s view on Islam but contributed to Catholic-Muslim dialogue throughout the twentieth century. In particular Anawati, who became member of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity as well as the Pontifical Council for Culture, played a key role in Christian-Muslim relations until his death in 1994.42

The Present Position of the Dominican Order towards Islam

Chenu’s ‘theology of openness toward the world’ led not only to the foundation of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo and inspired the Second Vatican Council’s teachings on Islam, but it was also institutionalized in his own Order. That his thinking continues to influence contemporary encounters between Dominicans and Muslims is evident when recalling Chenu’s above-mentioned letter to his provincial in 1938, in which he describes a

40. ‘Pendant le temps libre, il [Chenu] […] fréquentait, par exemple, les réunions des représentants ou des spécialistes de l’islam à Rome bien avant que le secrétariat pour les religions non chrétiennes fût créé’ (Rolland, ‘Le Père Chenu’, 252–253).
41. ‘La plupart des réflexions que le Concile de Vatican II inspire à tant de théologiens, le souci de dialogue avec ceux qui ne partagent pas notre foi, celui de la présence au monde […] on peut dire sans crainte de se tromper que le Père Chenu nous en parlait déjà [au Saulchoir], il y a trente ans’ (Jacques Jomier, ‘Une leçon d’espérance’, in: L’hommage offert au Père Chenu, 58–60, here 59).
43. ‘Non agitur de victoria super Islam ingenue consequenda, nec de convertendo hic illuc quaedam particularia individua, sic a sua communitate ca seiusendo. Conari debemus ut, in contextu evolutionis religiosae actualis, intelligamus significationem dilatationis huicis religionis universalis […] per praesentiam attentum, auscultante ac serio perscrutando Islam necon eius doctrinam et culturam’ (ACG Avila, chap 2, no 41).
of Ávila in 1986. At the Chapter, he was appointed a member of the commission 'On today's mission,' which drafted chapter two of the newly defined five priorities of the mission of the Order. Morelon contributed to his commission the quoted passages from the founding charter of the Institute, which were in fact composed by Chenu in 1938.  

The succeeding chapters have confirmed the Order's approach towards Islam, as defined in Ávila. The General Chapter of Bogotá in 2007, for instance, states 'inter-religious dialogue was one of the frontiers declared at Ávila in 1986 which we wish to emphasise again. This frontier, which has a long history in the Order, concerns us today because of the places in which we are established. It is in meeting with others who see a different face of God that we discover our true identity as "a people for others".' The General Chapter further emphasized that 'Islamic-Christian dialogue has become one of the crucial questions of our time and one of the great challenges for our preaching in certain regions of the world for several reasons: globalization, the growth in religious extremism, questions raised by religious pluralism and cultural diversity.' Interfaith dialogue and, in particular, the dialogue with Muslims thus remains among the fundamental priorities of the mission of the Dominicans.

Concluding Remarks

Following Chenu's notion of a perpetual act of incarnation in the realities of the world, that is in time and in history, five suggestions for a future direction of the Dominican engagement in the Near and Middle East are proposed here. First, continuing the local Dominican presence in Muslim-majority societies, in particular in the context of emigration of local Christians. Second, studying the religious and cultural heritage of the Arabo-Islamic world with a particular

attention to the history of Christian-Muslim relations. Third, collaborating in academic work, as far as possible, with Muslim, local Christian, and other scholars to bridge the gap between the different communities. Fourth, making the results available to the interested public in the local as well as Western societies as a contribution to ongoing discussions in the humanities. And, finally, reflecting theologically on the experience of a multicultural research group as well as on the importance of our results in the field of historical studies for the notion of the incarnate Word of God and a theology of religious pluralism.

44. Personal communication with Régis Morelon, 2015.
46. ACG Bogotá, chap 2, no 83.