

New Series

Volume 2

No. 1

January

2022



Maria

A Journal of Marian Studies

Published by the Marian Centre for Studies

Pages 1-14

Author: Rita George-Tvrtković

Title: The Islamic Mary in Catholic Debates on the Immaculate Conception

Abstract

This paper considers several medieval, early modern, and modern theologians who cited Islamic scripture and tradition in intra-Catholic debates on the Immaculate Conception. Even after it was declared a dogma in 1854, there were still a few Catholics as late as the 1950s who mentioned Islam in their discussions of this Marian doctrine. But why did theologians at any point in time refer to the Muslim Mary in association with the Immaculate Conception, given that Christian maculists (not to mention most immaculists) have never considered Islamic texts to be authoritative?

Author

Rita George-Tvrtković is Professor of Theology at the Benedictine University in Lisle, Illinois, USA.

The Islamic Mary in Catholic Debates on the Immaculate Conception

(This paper was presented at the Centre of Marian Studies conference of July 8-10 2021, 'Bridges and Boundaries: The Role of the Virgin Mary in Faith and Culture')

Introduction

Intra-Catholic debates on the Immaculate Conception began to intensify in the later medieval and early modern periods. The sides were quickly set, with Franciscans like Duns Scotus and Jesuits like Robert Bellarmine arguing for the immaculist position, and Bernard of Clairvaux and Dominicans like Thomas Aquinas and John of Torquemada arguing against.¹ A peculiar and little-studied aspect of these debates are those pro-immaculist theologians who cited Islamic scripture and tradition in support of their claims. This seemingly unusual practice began to be noted sporadically in the last decade or so, by scholars such as Stephen Mossman writing on Marquard von Lindau, Jesse Mann on Juan de Segovia, Jacob Langeloh on the Council of Basel, and John Tolan on examples of early modern immaculist art featuring Muhammad.² Then I began to notice the phenomenon myself, while studying the writings of early modern Catholics such as Juan Andrés, Guillaume Postel, and Ludovico Marracci, all the way up to mid-twentieth century churchmen such as the Dominican Georges Anawati and Bishop Fulton Sheen. Those historical Christians who connected the Immaculate Conception to Islamic Mariology are a select group indeed: they either needed to have personal knowledge of Arabic, the Qur'an, and Islamic literature, or relied on others who did.

¹ Thirteenth-century Parisian masters like Aquinas, Albertus, and Bonaventure were against the Immaculate Conception because they wanted to uphold the doctrine of Christ as redeemer and savior of all; to do so, Mary had to have been born with original sin like everyone else (although they did believe she was purified while in the womb). At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Duns Scotus tried to reconcile the two teachings by saying that Jesus saved his mother from contracting original sin. Relevant literature on this topic is cited in the footnotes below.

² Stephen Mossman, 'The Western Understanding of Islamic Theology in the Later Middle Ages', *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 74.1, 2007, 169-224; Jesse D. Mann, 'Throwing the Book at Them: John of Segovia's Use of the Qur'an', *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* 26.1, 2019, 79-96; Jacob Langeloh, *Der Islam auf dem Konzil von Basel. Eine Studie mit Editionen und Übersetzungen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Johannes von Ragusa*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2019, especially 45-69; John Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*, Princeton University Press, 2019, especially 126-31, 'Mahomet Testifies to the Immaculate Conception'. The most complete discussion of this topic to date can be found in Réjane Gay-Canton, 'Lorsque Muhammad orne les autels. Sur l'utilisation de la théologie islamique dans la controverse autour de l'immaculée conception de la fin du xive au début du xviiiè siècle', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 94.2, 2010, 201-48.

This paper will consider several medieval and modern Catholics who cited the Qur'an and/or other Islamic literature in support of the Immaculate Conception. But why would a Christian theologian do such a thing? If the maculists were unconvinced by arguments from the Bible, why would they accept the authority of, much less be convinced by, arguments from Muslim texts? And even after the Immaculate Conception was declared a dogma in 1854, and intra-Catholic debates ceased, why did some Catholics *still* feel the need to bring up the Islamic Mary?

Later Medieval Examples

Since the thirteenth century, most Franciscans (Bonaventure is a notable exception) were strong proponents of the Immaculate Conception. Therefore, it is not surprising that the German Marquard von Lindau OFM (d. 1392) would argue for this doctrine in his magnum opus, the *Dekalogerklärung* (Explanation of the 10 Commandments), a text which is both catechetical and Mariological, in that it explains the commandments via Marian themes.³ What is somewhat surprising is that this Franciscan's argument for the Immaculate Conception includes quotes from a book by a Dominican, Ramon Martí (d. 1285). The quotes are not taken from Martí himself, but rather, from Martí's citations of the Qur'an and other Islamic literature in his *Pugio Fidei*, an anti-Jewish polemic that sometimes uses Islam to argue for Christian positions and against Jewish ones.⁴

Stephen Mossman's research on Marquard highlights what he believes to be unique evidence for the Immaculate Conception given by a Latin Christian: a quote from one of the two Qur'anic Annunciation stories (Sura 3.42-46) about Mary's purity and chosenness, plus a reference to a narrative in the hadith literature (al-Bukhari), which says that Mary and Jesus are the only children of Adam who were not touched by Satan. However, as we will see, the practice of a Christian citing the Qur'an and hadith in a Marian argument is not unique to Marquard at all.⁵ Even so, Marquard is likely the first Latin Christian to link these particular verses to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This is because even though Marquard

³ Mossman, 'The Western Understanding', 172.

⁴ Mossman, 'The Western Understanding', 182.

⁵ Mossman, 'The Western Understanding', 175.

was relying on a hundred-year-old book as his source for the quotes, Martí's original use of the al-Bukhari hadith in *Pugio Fidei* had nothing to do with the Immaculate Conception, a term he does not even use. (The term 'Immaculate Conception' was rarely used in Latin sources before the fifteenth century, with the phrase 'Mary's conception' being preferred instead.⁶) Rather, Martí cites the Qur'an and hadith to make a different argument (about Mary's status as a prophet) to a different audience (Jews). In so doing, Martí is trying to show that Islamic and Christian doctrines are in accord against Judaism. But he is not arguing for the Immaculate Conception.

Marquard was. And in so doing, he just might be one of the first Latins to cite Islamic texts as evidence in an *intra-Christian* debate.⁷ Others followed Marquard's lead, as we shall soon see. However, while most other immaculists quote the same al-Bukhari hadith that Marquard does, he does not quote the Qur'anic verse that most others do—Sura 3.36, which describes Mary's mother praying that God would protect Mary and her offspring from Satan, a verse that is directly linked to the hadith about Mary and Jesus as the only two children of Adam not touched by Satan. Rather, Marquard quotes from Sura 3.42-46, which has the angel describing Mary as chosen and purified by God. In any case, Marquard is notable for several reasons: for using Muslim arguments, taken from a Christian polemical work against Jews, to defend his pro-immaculist position in an intra-Christian squabble in a catechetical work meant for non-specialists.

Nearly half a century later, at the Council of Basel (1431-49), pro-immaculist theologians continued to refer to the same Qur'anic verses and hadith cited by Marquard and Martí.⁸ The Council was forced to deal with the Immaculate Conception after prelates celebrated the (still unofficial) Feast of the Virgin's Conception on December 8, 1435 and heard a sermon by Jean de Rouvroy (d. 1461), who cited a passage from the Franciscan exegete Nicholas of Lyra's (d. 1349) *Libellum contra quemdam Judaeum*, whose discussion of the Annunciation in Luke 1.35 included references to Sura 3.42 (Mary was chosen and purified

⁶ Thomas Izbicki, 'The Immaculate Conception and Ecclesiastical Policies from the Council of Basel to the Council of Trent: The Dominicans and Their Foes', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 96, 2005, 145-170, at 146.

⁷ Mossman, 'The Western Understanding', 194.

⁸ There are many other theologians before and after Basel who do the same, including Jean Vital (1389), François Martin (1390), François de Rimini (c. 1430) and Pietro Arrivabene da Canneto (d. 1513). For a discussion of these and others, see Gay-Canton, 'Lorsque Muhammad orne les autels', 201-48.

by God) plus the same al-Bukhari hadith about Jesus and Mary being free from Satan's touch.⁹ While Lyra follows Marquard in taking his Islamic citations directly from Martí, the two had distinct goals in doing so.¹⁰ Lyra wanted to defend Mary's purity against the Jews, while Marquard was trying to prove the Immaculate Conception to his fellow Christians. Rouvroy followed Marquard (and Lyra) in misidentifying the al-Bukhari hadith as being from the Qur'an.¹¹ Rouvroy also followed Marquard in being the second case of a Christian engaged in an intra-religious discussion of the Immaculate Conception by citing Islamic sources found in a Christian text (Lyra's) of a different genre, intended for a different purpose and a different audience.

Another churchman at the Council of Basel who likewise argued for the Immaculate Conception using Islamic sources was Juan de Segovia. Segovia is significant not only for being part of the committee which wrote the 1438 Basel decree on the Immaculate Conception, but also for using the Qur'an in his own pro-immaculist texts, including *Allegationes pro sancta conceptione* (1436).¹² Here, he also takes his argument from Lyra and Martí.¹³ But the genre of Segovia's text is an intra-Christian apologetic, and thus it is possible that he is the first Latin Christian to cite Islam in a book whose sole purpose was to argue for the Immaculate Conception (Marquard's immaculist argument comprised only a portion of his *Dekalogerklärung*, a book whose main goal was catechesis, not polemics). In 1438, Segovia again writes about the Immaculate Conception and again cites the same Qur'anic passage but now 'according to a more accurate translation', which was the result of his further study of

⁹ Langeloh, *Der Islam auf dem Konzil von Basel*, 50.

¹⁰ Langeloh, *Der Islam auf dem Konzil von Basel*, 47-48.

¹¹ Gay-Canton, 'Lorsque Muhammad', 238.

¹² The 1439 Basel decree stated that the Immaculate Conception 'must be approved, held and professed by all Catholics'. However, while the decree included the terminology of a doctrinal definition, the council meeting of this period was subsequently declared not to have full ecumenical authority. Of course, many at Basel disagreed. The most prominent Basel theologian who argued against the Immaculate Conception was the Dominican John of Torquemada; however, while he was present at the Council, his arguments on this topic were never officially presented there. After that, other Dominican immaculists included Italians such as Raphael of Pornasio (fl. 1441) and Vincent Bandelli (fl. 1475), and Spanish Dominicans, who later (c. 1615-1650), began preaching against the doctrine in Seville and elsewhere. This was followed by a flurry of popular pro-immaculist treatises, songs, poems, and art throughout Spain. Dominicans responded by attempting to destroy immaculist images, while some immaculists (including Jesuits) physically attacked Dominicans. There were riots in Seville and Granada. For more on this controversy, see Pablo González Tornel, 'The Immaculate conception controversy and the accusation of scandal. Public conflict and religious devotion in seventeenth-century Spain', *Renaissance Studies* 34.2, 2020, 156-72.

¹³ Mann, 'Throwing the Book at Them', 83.

Robert of Ketton's Qur'an.¹⁴ (Segovia's own translation of the Qur'an wasn't commissioned until 1455.¹⁵) Jesse Mann notes that Segovia's justification in using the Qur'an to argue for the Immaculate Conception is aligned with the common medieval trope of bringing up Muslims to shame Christians: for if even Muslims, whose religion is false, affirm Mary's immaculate conception, how much more should Christians, whose religion is true, believe in it?¹⁶ This is one possible answer to the question asked at the beginning of the article: why would the immaculists attempt to convince maculists, their fellow Christians, about the validity of the Immaculate Conception by quoting non-Christian texts?

To sum up, in the later medieval period it was not common for Latin Christians to cite Muslim texts in pro-immaculist arguments. But for those who did, they rarely took passages directly from the Qur'an or hadith based on their own first-hand study of these sources in Arabic. Rather, they cited the same few Islamic passages (Sura 3.36; Sura 3.42; al-Bukhari) taken from a different context (Christian-Jewish debate), and from different arguments (Martí arguing for Mary as prophet; Lyra arguing for Mary's purity). Marquard von Lindau is the first to apply these passages to intra-Christian debates about the Immaculate Conception, followed by Rouvroy and then Segovia. As we move into the early modern period, other immaculists would continue to follow their lead.

Early Modern Examples

The research by Mossman, Mann, and Langeloh into the Islamic citations of medieval pro-immaculists is important because it shows the influence of Iberians like Martí (who were familiar with Islamic literature) on non-Iberians like Marquard, Lyra, and Rouvroy (who were not). The same will be the case in the early modern period, as we shall see, when later theologians were likewise influenced by Iberians. However, as knowledge of Arabic and Islamic literature grew among Northern Europeans in the early modern period, we begin to

¹⁴ Mann, "Throwing the Book at Them", 84.

¹⁵ For more on Segovia's tri-lingual Qur'an, see Ulli Roth, 'Juan of Segovia's Translation of the Qur'an', *Al Qantara* 35/2, 2014, 562 and Davide Scotto, "'De pe a pa": Il Corano trilingue di Juan de Segovia (1456) e la conversione pacifica dei musulmani', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 48, 2012, 515-77.

¹⁶ Mann, 'Throwing the Book at Them', 84. For more on this common trope (citing Muslims to shame Christians), see Ulli Roth and Davide Scotto, 'Auf der Suche nach der Ersunde im Koran: *Die Allegationes de peccatis primi parentis* des Juan de Segovia', *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 17, 2015, 191, and Rita George-Tvrtković, *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2012, 43-50.

see arguments connecting the Immaculate Conception and Islam more frequently, and inserted into different genres, such as Qur'anic translations and commentaries (for example, those by the French Orientalist Guillaume Postel and the Italian translator Ludovico Marracci).

After Ramon Martí, the next Iberian whose citations of Islamic Mariological texts influenced Christian discussions of the Immaculate Conception was Juan Andrés (b. c. 1460), a convert to Christianity from Islam.¹⁷ His 1515 book *Confusión o Confutación de la Secta Mahomética y del Alcorán*, originally published in Spanish, was soon translated into Italian, French, Latin, English, and German.¹⁸ Its genre is both a polemic against Islam and an apologetic for Christianity, with a stated goal of swaying 'ignorantes moros' to convert.¹⁹ In Chapter 11, Andrés tells us that he intends to prove certain Catholic doctrines, especially Christological and Mariological teachings, using both the Qur'an and hadith. Chapter 11's long title contains a list of Christian Mariological points that Andrés claims are affirmed by Islam: Mary was a virgin, she was raised in the temple, she was fed miraculously by God, she had Christ's birth announced to her by an angel, she was told by the angel that God had chosen her above all women, etc.²⁰ Note that this list includes elements of Christian Mariology from both the Bible and tradition (for example, the idea that Mary was raised in the temple and fed miraculously by God is found in the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*, not the Bible).²¹ Of particular concern within the text of Chapter 11 is Andrés' assertion that the Qur'an affirms that Mary was 'conceived without original sin', a phrase which he italicizes repeatedly throughout the 1515 edition. Also in Chapter 11, Andrés claims that Mary's immaculate conception can be inferred from Sura 3.36.²² Andrés then notes that the 'glossators' of Sura 3.36 'conclude that Mary was conceived without original sin,' although he doesn't mention the name of the 'gloss' (by which he likely means the hadith).²³

¹⁷ For more on Juan Andrés, see Ryan Szpiech, 'A Witness of Their Own Nation: On the Influence of Juan Andrés' in Mercedes García-Arenal et al. (eds), *After Conversion: Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, 174-98.

¹⁸ Juan Andrés, *Confusión o Confutación de la Secta Mahomética y del Alcorán*, ed. Elise Ruiz García and Isabel García-Monge, Mérida: Editora Regionale de Extremadura, 2003, 203.

¹⁹ Andrés, *Confusión*, 92.

²⁰ Andrés, *Confusión*, 210.

²¹ *Protevangelium of James* in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. J.K. Elliott, Oxford: Clarendon, 1993, 57-67. Interestingly, the full text of this apocryphal gospel (but not its stories, which were well known by medieval Latin Christians) was reintroduced to the West by Guillaume Postel's Latin translation of 1552. See Irene Backus, 'Guillaume Postel, Theodore Bibliander et le Proétevangile de Jacques', *Apocrypha* 6, 1995, 7-65.

²² Andrés, *Confusión*, 212.

²³ Andrés, *Confusión*, 212.

While Andrés is correct to note that many aspects of Biblical and Qur'anic Mariology are in accord, there are at least two Christian doctrinal points mentioned by him in Chapter 11 that would *not* be affirmed by Muslims. First, that Mary was a *perpetual* virgin (recall Ignatius of Loyola's heated argument with a Moor on this particular topic in his autobiography).²⁴ Second and most importantly, the idea that Mary was conceived explicitly 'without original sin'. Islam does not have a doctrine of original sin. And without the doctrine of original sin, Mary's Immaculate Conception is entirely unnecessary. In any case, Juan Andrés' overall Marian focus in his book is notable, and would influence later readers. Given that Andrés was a former Muslim, one wonders if Mary was used by local Christian evangelists in their efforts to convert him and other Iberian Muslims.²⁵

A few decades later, the French Catholic Orientalist Guillaume Postel (d. 1581) likewise cites Islamic texts in his discussions of the Immaculate Conception. Unlike Marquard, Lyra, and Rouvroy before him, Postel is a scholar of Islam with expertise in Arabic and other Semitic languages. Postel's magnum opus, *De orbis terrae Concordia* (1543), a four-volume work about religious concord, includes an entire section on Islam (Book II), which contains an outline of the life of Muhammad, a translation/paraphrase of the entire Qur'an (done by Postel himself), and an outline of key theological agreements and disagreements between Islam and Christianity. Several items on Postel's theological list pertain to Mary. He notes these differences: she secluded herself from family when pregnant, she gave birth alone under a palm tree, she was the 'sister of Aaron', and baby Jesus spoke from the cradle to defend her purity.²⁶ And he then outlines what he believes are these similarities: Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, she gave birth to a son named Jesus who is predicted to be great, and 'from her parents she was free from sin'.²⁷ Note that one of the three points of supposed Christian-Muslim agreement on Mary here is overstated. While Sura 3.36 describes Mary's mother asking God to protect Mary and Mary's future offspring from Satan, her prayer

²⁴ Paul Richard Blum, 'How to Deal with Muslims? Raymond Lull and Ignatius of Loyola' in Ian Christopher Levy, Rita George-Tvrtković, and Donald F. Duclow (eds), *Nicholas of Cusa and Islam: Polemic and Dialogue in the Late Middle Ages*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, 160-76.

²⁵ There is evidence that domestic Marian art was used by some Iberian *moriscos* to prove that they had converted to Christianity. See the article by Borja Franco Llopis and Francisco Javier Moreno Díaz del Campo, 'The Moriscos' Artistic Domestic Devotions Viewed through Christian Eyes in Early Modern Iberia', in M. Faini and A. Meneghin (eds), *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World*, Leiden: Brill, 2018, 107-25.

²⁶ Postel, *De orbis terrae concordia libri quatuor*, Basel: Oporinus, 1544, 157.

²⁷ Postel, *De orbis*, 157.

comes *after* Mary's birth. Yet Postel clearly alludes to the Immaculate Conception of Mary here when he claims Islamic Mariology affirms that she was free from sin or shame at the moment she was conceived by her parents.²⁸ This overstatement parallels what Juan Andrés says in Chapter 11 of his *Confutatio*; it is therefore noteworthy that Postel explicitly mentions Andrés as one of his sources in *De orbis*.²⁹ Strangely, Postel's translation of Sura 3.36 later in *De orbis* does not make any immaculist claims at all; rather, Postel stays closer to the Qur'anic text here, with no mention of Mary being sinless since conception, nor any reference to the hadith from al-Bukhari.³⁰

In a later Mariological text, Postel argues more explicitly for the Immaculate Conception. *Du souverain effect de la plus excellente corone du monde*, a short (sixteen-page) unpublished autograph manuscript, is an extended encomium of Mary, discussing her queenship, the rosary, her virtues, the Annunciation, and her conception.³¹ To prove the purity of her conception, Postel explicitly mentions 'Muhammad's Qur'an' as a source of evidence, and paraphrases 3.36: 'Muhammad believes in the Qur'an that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin... never did Satan touch Jesus nor his mother, that is to say, neither one nor the other had mortal sin nor original sin.'³² Postel is clearly referring to Sura 3.36 here, yet he does not cite chapter and verse. Also, note that he adds the part about Mary being conceived without original sin at the end; surely Postel knew that Islam has no doctrine of original sin? Surprisingly, Postel does not mention the key hadith from al-Bukhari here to support his claim, as did so many of his predecessors. It seems rather odd that Postel, the scholar of Arabic and Islam that he was, would ignore the hadith literature in his immaculist argument.³³

²⁸ Postel, *De orbis*, 157, says 'a parentibus probris fuit excepta'.

²⁹ Postel, *De orbis*, 157. Here, Postel lists Christians who wrote anti-Islamic polemics before him, criticizing those who did so without knowing Arabic (he mentions Nicholas of Cusa among others), and praising those who did know Arabic well (he praises only two by name: Riccoldo da Montecroce and Juan Andrés).

³⁰ Postel, *De orbis*, 175. His translation of Sura 3.36: 'illa et eius progeniem tuo munere et auxilio defendo a malo demonae' ['she and her progeny will be protected from bad demons by the gift of your aid'.]

³¹ Postel, *Du souverain effect de la plus excellente corone du monde* (Of the sovereign effect of the most excellent crown in the world), Paris BNF MS Fons Français 2114 Folio 61ff.

³² Postel, *Du souverain*, 65 recto. Translation from the French is mine.

³³ Two last notes about Postel's unpublished *Du souverain* manuscript and its context. First, this piece was likely written in the early 1570s, just a few years after the end of the Council of Trent, which was not exactly silent about the Immaculate Conception, but nevertheless remained non-committal on the topic. Trent's fifth session on original sin (1546) declares: 'This same holy Synod does nevertheless declare, that it is not its intention to include in this decree, where original sin is treated of, the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, the mother of

Over a century later, another scholar of Islam, the Italian Ludovico Marracci, likewise connects Islamic texts and the Immaculate Conception. Marracci is most famous for his relatively accurate Arabic to Latin translation of the Qur'an, *Textus Universus* (1698), which includes a large scholarly apparatus.³⁴ Marracci's reference to the Immaculate Conception here is similar to Postel's in *De orbis*, in that his book is likewise *not* devoted to the immaculist theme, but rather, is a Qur'anic translation and commentary which includes only marginal discussions of the Immaculate Conception. The fact that both Postel and Marracci include mention of the Immaculate Conception in a text devoted to Qur'anic translation/commentary, rather than in a text devoted to Mariology, highlights the importance of taking genre into consideration. For when Marracci brings up the Immaculate Conception, it is not to argue for it (although he certainly takes it for granted as a valid Catholic doctrine). Rather, he brings up the Immaculate Conception to serve his primary goal, which is philological accuracy. Marracci is attentive to Islamic sources and their relation to Catholic doctrines primarily because they help to illuminate the text.

In his notes on Sura 3.36, Marracci mentions the idea of Mary's immunity from original sin, and then cites Islamic literature to bolster his exegesis of the verse. His employment of the hadith and other texts in his immaculist discussion here is more extensive than his predecessors. Not only does he clearly distinguish between the Qur'an and hadith, but his citations of hadith and exegetical texts are more frequent, more thorough, and more accurate. For example, in his notes on 3.36 he names several Islamic commentators, and includes the actual text in Arabic.³⁵ In fact, in this short section, Marracci cites by name more Muslim sources for the immaculist position than any other Latin Christian before him. One of the sources mentioned by Marracci here is 'Abu Hureira', which is a reference to the transmitter of the famous al-Bukhari quote; but there are several other Muslim authors named, including 'Gelal', 'Thalebiensis', and 'Cottada'.³⁶ In short, Marracci's Islamic

God; but that the constitutions of Pope Sixtus IV of happy memory, are to be observed, under the pains contained in the said constitutions, which it renews'. And second, Postel's support for the Immaculate Conception is not surprising, given his French nationality and his association with the Jesuits. In so doing, he follows the French (and Jesuit) immaculist stance. For more on the latter point, see Izbicki, 'The Immaculate Conception and Ecclesiastical Policies', 156-58.

³⁴ Ludovico Marracci, *Textus Universus* (Padua, 1698), available online at:

<https://archive.org/details/AlcoranusTextusMaracci/Alcoranus-Textus-Maracci/page/n457/mode/2up>.

³⁵ Marracci, *Textus Universus*, 112.

³⁶ For example, Marracci cites 'Gelal', which is Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti's *Tafsir Jalalayn* (or *Commentary of the Two Jalals*); see Thomas Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

references are much more substantial compared to any of his Latin Christian predecessors, and more accurate than most. This is in contrast to Lyra and Marquard, for example, whose references contain errors such as confusing al-Bukhari (whom they both label as 'Albokon') with the Qur'an (spelled 'Alkoron'), which betrays their lack of language skill and any real understanding of Islamic literature.³⁷ Marracci, on the other hand, possessed both, and thus the Islamic evidence he provides in support of immaculist claims is more extensive than all the other Latin Christians before him, even though furnishing such proof was not his main goal in writing this section.

Modern Examples

The 1854 papal decree promulgating the Immaculate Conception, *Ineffabilis Deus*, does not mention Islamic literature at all. Rather, its focus is on the long historical Christian tradition (including references to liturgy, magisterial teaching, and popular piety) which Pope Pius IX claims serves as the basis for this dogma. However, even a century after the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed, when evidence in support of the teaching was no longer required, there were still a few Catholics who explicitly mentioned the Islamic-immaculist connection. Just two will be discussed here.

First, the famous American televangelist Bishop Fulton Sheen includes an entire chapter, 'Mary and the Moslems' [sic], in his 1952 book, *The World's First Love: Mary the Mother of God*.³⁸ As director of the American Society for the Propagation of the Faith from 1950 to 1966, Sheen travelled the world visiting missionaries, and it is clear that almost everything he says about the Islamic Mary is based on knowledge he gained from missionaries working on the ground in Africa and Asia, who informed him about the regularity of local Muslims visiting Catholic shrines to Mary. For example, Sheen notes: 'Our missionaries report the most extraordinary reaction of these people as the Pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima was carried through the East. At the edge of Nepal, three hundred Catholics were joined by

Press, 2009, 231. Marracci also names other Islamic exegetes such as 'Thalebiensis', (al-Tha'labi) and 'Cottada' (likely Qatada ibn Diama al-Sadusi, or Abu Khattab), *Textus Universus*, 112.

³⁷ Langeloh, *Der Islam auf dem Konzil von Basel*, 48-9.

³⁸ Fulton Sheen, *The World's First Love: Mary the Mother of God*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952.

three thousand Hindus and Moslems.³⁹ Sheen also speaks explicitly about the Islamic connection to the Immaculate Conception in this chapter; however, his references to Islam here show him to be more like Marquard or Rouvroy (and less like Postel or Marracci) due to his minimal knowledge of Arabic. Sheen notes:

First of all, the Koran believes in her Immaculate Conception and, also, in her Virgin Birth... When one compares the Koran's description of the birth of Mary with the apocryphal Gospel of the birth of Mary, one is tempted to believe that Mohammed very much depended upon the latter... when she conceives, the mother of Mary is made to say in the Koran: 'O Lord, I vow and I consecrate to you what is already within me. Accept it from me.' When Mary is born, the mother says: 'And I consecrate her with all of her posterity under thy protection, O Lord, against Satan!'⁴⁰

Thus Sheen quotes (and misconstrues) Sura 3.36, the very same verse cited by so many Christians before him, when discussing Islamic proofs of the Immaculate Conception, as we have seen. Sheen seems entirely unaware of the verse from al-Bukhari, since he does not reference it here, where it would make sense to do so.

So why does Sheen include a Qur'anic affirmation of the Immaculate Conception in his book at all? He does not need to prove a dogma promulgated by the Catholic Church a century earlier. Rather, it seems that he highlights this supposed similarity between the Islamic and Christian Marys for evangelical purposes: 'In any apologetic endeavor, it is always best to start with that which people already accept. Because the Moslems have a devotion to Mary, our missionaries should be satisfied merely to expand and to develop that devotion, with the full realization that Our Blessed Lady will carry the Moslems the rest of the way to her Divine Son.'⁴¹ Sheen's goal was always evangelization, and Mary in this chapter is clearly a tool for mission among Muslims.

The second example from the mid-twentieth century is Georges Anawati, an Egyptian Dominican scholar of Islam who not only headed up IDEO (the Dominican Institute for Islamic Studies) in Cairo, but was also to become one of the main framers of *Nostra Aetate's* section 3 on Islam. In 1958, Anawati contributed a chapter 'Islam and the Immaculate Conception' to

³⁹ Sheen, *The World's First Love*, 193-4.

⁴⁰ Sheen, *The World's First Love*, 206.

⁴¹ Sheen, *The World's First Love*, 208.

the book *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, a scholarly but also slightly apologetic book published during the Marian decade.⁴² Anawati's very first paragraph includes the al-Bukhari quote about Adam's children. But the goal of his chapter is not to prove the Immaculate Conception. Rather, Anawati does something quite novel for Catholic theology at this time: he writes comparative theology *avant la lettre*. Comparative theology, a relatively new theological subdiscipline founded in the 1980s by Francis Clooney and James Fredericks, is defined as 'acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions'.⁴³ Anawati's chapter compares Catholic and Islamic doctrines on sin and Mary, and ends with three conclusions: 1. Islam does not have a doctrine of original sin; 2. While Islam acknowledges Mary's preservation from Satan's touch, the Marian privilege is irrelevant to Islam; 3. Christians should be careful not to read their own doctrines into Islamic Mariology.⁴⁴

Anawati and Sheen are relatively unusual in the 1950s for highlighting the connection between Islam and the Immaculate Conception (Louis Massignon is another important example⁴⁵) because they both had first-hand knowledge of Islam and Muslims, either by living as a native of the Islamic world (Anawati) or by traveling throughout the Islamic world and listening to missionaries living there (Sheen). In the 1950s, Islamic proofs for the Immaculate Conception were no longer needed, but in the Marian decade that preceded Vatican II and its *Nostra Aetate*, the Islamic Mary remained of interest to Catholics. However, both Sheen and Anawati (even as late as 1958) saw the Islamic Mary and Islam's supposed affirmation of her Immaculate Conception as a 'bridge to the conversion' of Muslims. For even Georges Anawati, who states that it is unwise to read Christian doctrines into Islamic texts, nevertheless ends his article on Islam and the Immaculate Conception with the following sentence: 'Perhaps God is inviting us to pursue this direction in order that those who are, like ourselves, sons of

⁴² Georges Anawati, 'Islam and the Immaculate Conception', in Edward O'Connor (ed.), *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958, 447-61.

⁴³ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*, Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021, 10.

⁴⁴ Anawati, 'Islam and the Immaculate Conception', 461.

⁴⁵ Massignon mentions the Immaculate Conception and Islam in his 'Le Signe Mariale', 216, according to Christian Krokus in *The Theology of Louis Massignon*, Washington: Catholic University Press, 2017, 87-9. Krokus notes that Massignon 'often referred to the "double Marian sign" of the Qur'an in reference to its supposed confirmation of both the Immaculate Conception and the virgin birth of Jesus', 86. Furthermore, Massignon observed: 'The testimonial monism of Islam, while refusing to accept the possibility of the Incarnation, refers nevertheless to the...Immaculate Conception', 'Muslim and Christian Mysticism' in Herbert Mason (ed.), *Testimonies and Reflections*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989, 130.

Abraham, and have such great respect for Mary's holiness, may be brought to know and love fully the son of her whose most beautiful title, eclipsing all others, is that of "Mother of God," *Theotokos*.⁴⁶ Yet, this proselytizing attitude would be entirely absent from *Nostra Aetate* 3, which Anawati helped write just seven years later. Instead, *Nostra Aetate* 3 clearly describes Marian doctrine and devotion as a two-way bridge to dialogue and friendship between Christians and Muslims, not a one-way bridge to conversion.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of later medieval and early modern Latin Christians referring to the Islamic Mary in pro-immaculist arguments and art is rare, but not as rare as one might think. Most medieval citations of Islamic texts were borrowed from the few Iberian Christians who knew Islam well (Ramon Martí, Juan Andrés), and were often taken from a different context (Christian-Jewish polemics) or different arguments (arguing about Mary's purity or prophethood), and inserted into intra-Christian arguments for the Immaculate Conception, by non-experts who were usually unable to distinguish between the Qur'an and hadith. The early modern period saw some improvement in Latin Christian understanding of Islamic literature, but the argument for the Immaculate Conception had not really developed beyond those same few citations, even by Christian scholars of Islam who moved their discussions of the Immaculate Conception to the margins of their Qur'anic translations and commentaries. Citations of what Christians believed to be Islamic affirmations of the Immaculate Conception (including quotes from the Qur'an and hadith, and portraits of Muhammad) even made it into early modern pro-immaculist art in Italy, Spain, and Croatia, suggesting how mainstream this idea had become.⁴⁷

After the dogma of 1854 was declared by Pope Pius IX, there was no need for immaculists to cite Islamic proofs against the maculists who technically no longer existed in

⁴⁶ Anawati, 'Islam and the Immaculate Conception', 461.

⁴⁷ For more on images of Muslims in early modern pro-immaculist art, see John Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, especially 126-31, 'Mahomet Testifies to the Immaculate Conception', and Ivana Čapeta Rakić and Giuseppe Capriotti, 'Two Marian Iconographic Themes in the Face of Islam on the Adriatic Coast in the Early Modern Period,' *Ikon* 10, 2017, 169-86.



the Catholic Church. But on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, an acknowledgement of the broader connections between the Islamic and Christian Marys became useful once again in intra-Christian debates—this time, not to validate the Immaculate Conception, which was no longer necessary, but rather, to argue for something new: that Catholics should engage in interreligious dialogue with Muslims. This is likely the reason why *Nostra Aetate* explicitly mentions the Virgin Mary in its list of key similarities between Christianity and Islam: ‘They [Muslims] also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion.’⁴⁸ The *periti* who framed this document (all of whom were both priests and scholars of Islam) suspected that ordinary Catholics, who were being ‘exhorted’ to engage in interreligious dialogue, would be more likely to do so if they knew that Muslims loved Mary as much as they did.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Nostra Aetate* 3. For more on the evolution of its line on Marian devotion, see Rita George-Tvrtković, ‘Meryem Ana Evi, Marian Devotion, and the Making of *Nostra aetate* 3’, *Catholic Historical Review* 103.4, 2017, 755-81.

⁴⁹ The framers of *Nostra Aetate* 3 included Georges Anawati, OP, Robert Caspar, M.Afr., and Joseph Cuoq, M.Afr., among others.