The contemporary attempts at understanding and conversation between the Jews, Christian and Muslims is taking place at various levels of concerns. This volume is an outgrowth of such a conversation which took place at the third of the symposium of the inter-religious colloquia organised by Oratio Dominica Foundation. In the "Foreword" the editor(s) retrace the origins of this collective work, and state that "The Oratio Dominica Foundation had already held Jewish-Christian and Christian-Islamic colloquia, when it was decided to invite representatives of the three great monotheistic religions to take part in further dialogue. This series of ecumenical colloquia is based upon a deep commitment to study of central aspects of faith in Judaism, Christianity and Islam." (p. 7). In order to place this book in a proper frame of reference, it is necessary to retrace the origins a little more thoroughly than the editors have done in the "Foreword".

The Oratio Dominica Foundation is a research organisation founded by Dr. Theophil Herder-Dorneich, the head of the Catholic publishing house, Herder Verlag in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. The discussions which took place during the three years of Vatican II (11th October, 1962 to 8th December, 1965) had opened Catholicism to the contemporary epistemological debates and led to a reshaping of its doctrine and practice. Dr. Herder-Dorneich inspired by this new approach requested Dr. Walter Strolz (one of the co-editors of this volume) to direct Oratio Dominica Foundation to organise various colloquia in the light of the developments after Vatican II. Thus, since the conclusion of Vatican II, and with the beginning of the conciliar movement, in 1965, the Oratio Dominica Foundation has been conducting colloquia dealing with religion and contemporary disciplines of knowledge and inter-religious symposia. This has helped in bringing about a certain amount of contemporariness to the epistemological issues in disciplines related to religion (and particularly Christianity and even more specifically Catholicism), as well as enhancing the possibilities of a broader inter-religious ecumenism. The period between 1965 to 1972 was devoted to conversations between Christianity and the contemporary disciplines of knowledge. Since 1972, this conversations has been directed to the dialogue of Christianity with other religions. The conversations which took place during the first phase were planned as a preparation for the second phase.
The conversation with the contemporary disciplines of knowledge began in 1965 with a symposium on the experience of God in Hellenism, Judaism, and Christianity. This was followed by a colloquium on scientific and biblical knowledge and on modern atheism. Next came a symposium on the world as expressed in different language games, here the linguistic insights of Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein played a major role. A symposium on natural science followed in which the various developments of Western science were studied from its beginning with the Greeks to its modern developments in physics and biology, including theories of evolution. This then led to studies of "the possibilities and limits of studies of the future and particularly the future of Judaism and Christianity after Auschwitz". These studies were complemented by several writings on topics such as Marxist and Christian understanding of the world, the hermeneutical question in theology, a work on the relationships of religion, faith history, and secularization.

The studies between 1965-1972 were intended to prepare the way for the inter-religious dialogue of succeeding years. As Dr. Strolz said, "the Christian conversation with other world religions, if it is to be successful even in its beginnings, is connected with the clarification of anthropological, philosophical, moral, psychological, and linguistic preconditions and realities".

So in 1973, the first inter-religious colloquium was held. This was a symposium on the "Lord's Prayer" and dealt with the common liturgical heritage between the Jews and the Christians.

The second symposium, on the monotheistic faith of Christianity and Islam, was held in 1974. This symposium dealt with the historical relations and the problematic aspects between Christians and Muslims.

Then followed the third symposium which grew into the book under consideration here. We shall discuss it in fuller details later.

The fourth symposium was of a more general nature and the foundational experiences of religion were discussed. It dealt with the challenge to religion as it faces the shaking of the traditional understanding of truth and value—experience of the various religious traditions.

The fifth symposium was again of a more general nature dealing with the cosmic dimension of religion.

The sixth symposium dealt with the universalistic dimension of salvation in the Biblical revelation as specified in Melchizedek the King of Salem and the Priest of the Most High who blesses Abraham in Genesis 14: 18-20.
The seventh symposium dealt with the contrast between theocentric and anthropocentric attitudes and the use of language as a reflection of these attitudes.8

The eighth symposium dealt with ways of building religious consciousness on such issues as ecology and education.9

The ninth symposium dealt with revelation in Jewish and Christian faith understandings. The discussions focused on the meaning of revelation and the way in which it occurs.10

The book under review is a collection of twelve essays by Jewish, Christians and Muslims scholars from around the world who examine not only the various theological issues at stake in such an encounter, but also the common understanding of the central experience of faith with a focus on monotheism, its implications, and future in our present historical situation. The English translation of this important work is therefore a very welcome contribution to the field of inquiry dealing with relations between the monotheistic religions.

The first essay is by Heinrich Gross, Professor of Old Testament Exegesis at the University of Regensburg, Germany. He deals with the polarity of the religious experience of the Jewish prophets. He points to the movement from the God of Sinai to God of Sion, and the difference between the nature and growth of the god Baal of the surrounding religions and the Jewish God Yahweh who is the God of history which is the arena of his salvific activity.

Albert H. Friedlander, Professor at Leo Baeck College, London, follows with a discussion on the characteristics of the Torah as being at once timeless and historical. His is an aphoristic and poetic attempt at talking of the close and distant God. He characterises the experience of the Jews as being more an acquaintance with night than with day and states that "the bitter almond of Jewish life contains human and divine suffering" (p. 27).

Abdoldjavad Falaturi, one of the Editors and Professor of Islamology and Philosophy at the University of Cologne, begins by asking a question "How is human experience of God possible in spite of strict Islamic Monotheism?", which is a repetition of the title of his article (p. 35). His concern is to deal with the problem of how in Islam, which avows the purest monotheism, an experience of God is possible. He says this apparent problématique and the question he has posed has the answer built in themselves from an Islamic perspective. Since in Islam the belief in monotheism is not dependent on any mediator between God and the human, the human experience of God is assured (p. 36). This is especially assured through the Quranic concept that Allah is light; this light shines forth from itself; this light is light of heaven and earth; that is, of the cosmos; and God offers His light to whomsoever He wills. (Cf. Quran 24: 35. p. 37)
Jakob J. Petuchowski, another Editor and Research Professor in Jewish Theology and Liturgy at Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, deals with divine revelation in modern Judaism. He states that while "a deep gulf (which) separates man from the transcendent God of the Hebrew Bible", this gulf is bridged through revelation while God remains God (p. 45). This revelation is of two kinds: it is a "vision" or "sight" and it is "the Word of the Lord". Rabbinical teaching further defines it as "Written Torah" and the "Oral Torah", the latter alone provides a complete understanding of the former. Thus in revelation both parties share in the process, there is the descending of God and the ascending of the human (p. 47).

Michael Brocke, Lecturer in Judaic Studies in the Catholic theological faculty of the University of Regensburg, picks on the medieval Christian theme of "the imitation of Christ" and changes it to "the Imitation of God". He however goes on to show that the imitation of God is not an abstract discussion as has been true of the discussion of the imitation of Christ in Christianity, but one that has socio-ethical implications. He argues that the imitation of God is possible even in Judaism and can be reconciled with the infinite distance between God and humanity. He supports his argument with a number of passages from the Bible, but primarily from the following: "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). But he also argues that this imitation of God is only possible through the attributes, activity and the name of God, which all have a qualitative factor which a human can try and imitate.

Franz Mussner, writes about Jesus Christ the son of God. He begins his essay by stating that dialogue should not ignore what is proper for each participant and what constitutes their essential difference. In Christianity that which is proper to it is contained explicitly in Christology and in this context it is the divine sonship of Jesus Christ. This assertion is much more than a mere status of Jesus as prophet, inspite of the fact that the concept of prophet is common to all three monotheistic religions. There is clearly a connection between the Christology of divine filiation of Jesus and the Christology of his prophetic ministry. He argues that while "the objection to the Christology of the Son raised by Judaism and Islam will persist in the future, the 'prophetic model' can provide common ground for discussion" (p. 84).

Erwin Gräf was the Professor of Islamology at the University of Cologne till his death in February of 1976, his essay was published posthumously. He discusses the various aspects of hope and faith in the various theological strains of Islam. This is the most technical of all essays dealing with the Arabic roots of faith and hope in the Quranic and other Muslim texts. In the latter he is dependent, among others, primarily on the works of Abu Hanifah and Al Ghazali. Besides discussing hope and faith in Islam, he has
very thorough discussions of the "five pillars" of Islam, and a most interesting discussion of the concept of "Fear of God" (ittiqa').

Michael Winter, an Islamicist at the University of Tel Aviv, acknowledges that his contribution on religious instruction in present-day Islam "lies outside the main lines of this colloquium" (p. 103), which in the end does turn out to be true. The scope of his study is very limited, he restricts himself to Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and the Arab education in Israel and on the West Bank. Thus he leaves out North Africa, Pakistan, and other countries. He critically evaluates the various text books and curricula he has studied and states that they "teach hatred for the Jews" (p. 113); and that they "have not succeeded in offering a synthesis of Islam and the modern world" (p. 114). His is the most uneven article in the book.

Hasan Askari, Professor of the Sociology of Religion at the Aligarh University, calling "the Oneness or Unity of God...a mystery par excellence" (p. 117), goes on to define it in two ways: (1) "The Oneness of the Law...(which) is perceptible and simple" (p. 117); and (2) "The Oneness of the Way". The perception of God here "requires neither imitation, nor argument, nor tradition" (p. 118). He discusses primarily the second aspect. He then has interesting sections on "The Koran: convergence of metaphysics and sociology" (pp. 122-123); "The Problem of the Monotheistic Thesis: Islamic Monotheism" (pp. 124-126); "Theism and Theodocy" (PP. 126-129); "Monolatry and Monotheism" (pp. 129-130); "Transcendental Monotheism and Sociological Relevance" (pp. 131-132). Though all these sections are creatively constructed, the article does not hang together well inspite of the author's attempt to pull his various themes together in his conclusion.

Wilhelm Dantine, Professor of Systematic Theology in the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Vienna, looks at the prophetic function of faith in contemporary Christianity. His article is a good complement to Mussner's essay on Jesus' Sonship and his prophetic ministry. Discussing and defining very thoroughly the nature and character of prophecy and prophetic ministry, he ends his essay by stating that, "There is ... no reason whatsoever why, in their prophetic service, they (the Christians) should dispense with the critical cooperation of other religions, especially the prophetic elements in Judaism and Islam" (p. 145).

Engelbert Mveng, SJ. Professor at the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon, is basically interested in the cultural and contextual issues in the interpretation of the sacred texts of the Bible and the Quran. His concern is primarily with Africa and the Black experience, with a critique of any one claiming to have the exclusive right of interpretation of these texts, whether they be the Western Christians or their counterpart in Islam. This, however, does not mean creating a new exclusivity, for he states that,
"When we speak of an African way concerning the Bible, we do not mean any monopoly over the Bible. We only mean the original contribution of Africa to the universality of the message of the Bible" (p. 152).

The last article is by Richard Friedli, Professor of Missiology at the University of Freibourg, Switzerland. The essay is to a large measure in the tradition of a sociology of religion with a focus on the ways to universal responsibility of the religions on issues such as peace, struggle against the powers, etc. His major concern is to ensure "that the religions no longer allow themselves to be outdone by politics, but in prophetic freedom show their solidarity with people who do not in the manner proselytizers wish to take over other's world, but try in the world to point in an exemplary fashion to the coming of the kingdom of God". According to him, "The time for controversial theology between religions has also gone by. We are on the way to a theology of cooperation which shows its sense of responsibility for the world" (p. 168).

The book is a very good example of inter-religious dialogue being carried out amongst scholars representing different faiths. The common theme, and one of great importance, which emerges is on the notion of prophet, prophecy and the implication of prophetic task for the monotheistic religions in the contemporary world. The poor printing at places, the strained English in the translation, and the cryptic and uneven quality of some of the essays, do not reduce the significance of this work.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See, Dr. Stroltz's article "Arbeitsbericht", in Melchisedek, Urgestalt der Ökumene (Herder, 1979), where he defines these phases and the development of these colloquia very well.
5. See Religiöse Grundfahrungen (Herder, 1977).
7. See, Melchisedek, Urgestalt der Ökumene (Herder, 1979).
8. See, Schöpfung und Sprache (Herder, 1979).
10. See, Offenbarung im jüdischen und christlichen Glaubensverständnis (Herder, 1981). For a more detailed discussion of the above background see Arthur Crabtree, "Inter-religious Ecumenism in Germany: The 'World Conversation' of the Oratio Dominica Foundation" in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies, vol. 19, No. 4, Fall 1982, pp. 794-802. The present author is deeply indebted to this article.
11. As expressed in the then famous work of this title by Thomas à Kempis in the fifteenth century.