

PRESS RELEASE

The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (R.I.I.F.S.) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (Vatican Office responsible for Interreligious Dialogue) (P.C.I.D.) held their first Colloquium.

The Colloquium took place in Amman from 18 to 20 May 2009, at the Royal Scientific Society (*al-Jam'iyya al-'Ilmiyya al-Malakiyya*).

The topic devoted to "Religion and Civil Society" has been examined focusing on three areas: 1) Religion and Civil Society in History and the Philosophico-juridical thought; 2) Religion and Civil Society in Modern Societies; 3) Religion and Civil Society in the Religious Tradition.

The Delegation of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies was headed by H.E. Ambassador Hasan Abu Nimah Director, R.I.I.F.S. and included the following dignitaries and scholars: Seyed Mohammed Ali Abtahi, President, Institute for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Iran; Prof. Mohamed al-Sharkawi, Cairo University; Prof. Mahmoud al-Sartawi, Member of the R.I.I.F.S. Board of Trustees, University of Jordan; Prof. Abdul Nasser Abul-Basal, President, The World Islamic Science and Education University, Member of the R.I.I.F.S. Board of Trustees; Mr. Mohamad Mahfoodh; Dr. Edieh Metlaq; Professor Saoud el Mawla, Lebanese University, Beirut; Mr. Khaled Nusseibeh; Dr. Mohammad Rayyan, University of Jordan; Dr. Hanan Ibrahim.

His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (P.C.I.D.) led the delegation of the Holy See, which had as its members His Excellency Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, Secretary of the P.C.I.D., and the Rev. Monsignor Khaled Akasheh, Bureau Chief for Islam at the P.C.I.D., as well as these other members: His Excellency Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, Apostolic Nuncio to Jordan and Iraq; His Excellency Msgr. Yasser Ayyach, Greek-Catholic Metropolitan of Jordan; His Excellency Msgr. Salim Sayegh, Auxiliary Bishop & Vicar General for Jordan; Rev. Prof. Andrea Pacini, Professor of Dogmatic Theology and of Theology of Religions; Rev. Prof. Joseph Ellul, O.P., Professor of Ecumenical Theology and Islamic Studies; Rev. Prof. Dr. Christian W. Troll, S.J., Honorary Professor for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations; Prof. Silvio Ferrari, Professor of Canon Law; Ms. Dima Al Baqain, Researcher; Dr. Asem Khalil, Associate Professor of Law.

A public session has been held at the Founders Theater, El-Hassan Science City at the end of the Colloquium. On that occasion HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal and His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran addressed the participants and the guests, thanking them respectively for their contribution during the Colloquium, and their presence at the concluding session.

The following points have been agreed upon:

- 1) The notion of civil society has been discussed and the participants underlined its character as a medium for an open exchange of experiences and visions aimed at pursuing the common good. The participants agreed on the importance of civil society for a sound and integral development of individuals and communities, recognizing the particular and indispensable contribution that civil society can provide as a valuable forum for dialogue in the context of the responsible exercise of freedom.
- 2) The participants stressed the importance of educating youth in the values of mutual respect and in the culture of dialogue, rejecting violence, so as to promote peaceful coexistence on the basis of full citizenship.
- 3) They highlighted the relevance of democracy and the rule of law in a State that respects ethnic, cultural and religious diversities and implements equality among citizens, on the basis of the respect of human dignity and the ensuing fundamental human rights, particularly freedom and justice.
- 4) Religions have a specific role to play in civil society, offering motivations for the citizens' contributions to the common good that are based on faith in God and which transcend political expediency and search for power.
- 5) The participants stressed the role that religions can play in strengthening social participation and cohesion, thereby giving their specific support to the building of a stable and prosperous State, based on the principle of subsidiarity.

It has been decided that the next Colloquium will be held in Rome within two years, preceded by a preparatory meeting where the theme and the modalities will be defined.

Amman, May 20th 2009.

Religion and Civil Society

A few salient points selected from the discussions of the seminar

I have been asked from the perspective of the Catholic delegation to highlight a few salient points marking the discussions of our conference. However, I shall confine myself during the short time assigned to me – naturally quite selectively -- some of the ideas that have been explained in one or the other of the papers presented by the Christian delegation. Learning about some of the key terms and points presented in the papers you will be enabled, I hope, to form yourselves an idea of the themes that dominated the discussions of the conference. What I report here refers mainly to the papers presented by the members of the Vatican delegation.

1. Civil Society

The term civil society (in the following: c. s.) was born at the end of the 18th century CE, hence about 250 years ago. C. s. defines a sphere of human activities that presents peculiar features. Every individual spends his life within a network of social relations which consists roughly speaking of four areas: family, state, market and c. s.. C. s. is made up of associations, trade unions, political parties, non-profit organizations, religiously-oriented schools, human rights advocacy groups, social movements. These are the actors in this area of human life.

Two adjectives characterize the relations within civil society: free and voluntary. In this area of human life which is termed c. s. individuals, as well as free associations made up of individuals, have the opportunity to develop together projects of life and of social organization. These smaller projects then can be reproduced on a larger scale as a model for the organization of the broader social community. An apt example would be the Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) which I got to know personally in the eighties and nineties of the last century in India. This voluntary, privately-funded

association planned and executed small scale health and hygiene projects by way of pilot projects. In case, after the experience of a few years, such small projects turned out to be successful, the VHAI presented them to the Indian Government that earlier had or might have rejected them as impracticable. In this was the VHAI moved the Indian Government, for instance, to introduce in village dispensaries and practiced by experienced qualified female and male health personal not possessing a doctoral degree in medicine, anesthesia for small medical interventions. The VHAI was a shared project of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and others.

C. s. constitutes a free space as it were, where groups and institutions belonging to and inspired by various religious or ideological groups act creatively and freely. Obviously such free space is found more easily in democratic societies where religious values form peoples lives rather than detailed and strictly applied an controlled legal prescriptions. Liberty is a necessary condition. It certainly involves the risks that go with liberty. C. s. institutions ideally form people that are committed, responsible and trustful. Groups and institutions of c. s. character can make a decisive contribution to the common good of the State, by providing values and attitudes that cut across narrow confessional boundaries in ethnically, religiously , ideologically and otherwise plural and differentiated nations. .

Now in today's societies and nations there obtains a plurality of "normative worlds", each characterized by its own set of values and rules. They generate worlds governed by a new law. The modern state then has the function and responsibility to take up these ideas, generated on the normative level by c. s. groups, evolving from them a new set of values. Here the state is understood as a system-maintaining force. It ideally provides a legal framework in which different projects of common good can peacefully co-exist.

2. Religion and civil society

How does religion relate to civil society? The religions, especially the monotheistic ones, teach: man is the repository of a truth given by God. The commitment, the personal responsibility and the mutual trust of which we

spoke a moment ago, need however a source. Religiously viewed they originate in man's responsibility towards God. In practice this means that liturgical and personal prayer, listening to and meditating God's word in creation and Scripture etc. are places, where values and attitudes are generated and formed.

But how can truth, e.g. the truth of revealed principles and of dogmas, be harmonized with liberty?

Here two answers were offered:

First, the believer will correctly view him/ or herself as a pilgrim towards an ever greater, but never complete, attainment of truth, as listening and learning disciple and precisely not as master or pole that would possess the truth. I can profess unconditionally the truth of my faith and publicly witness the events that changed my life and world view without the need to affirm the supremacy of my religion and the obligation of everybody to accept it.

The second answer was formulated only with regard to the Christian faith. Presumably different Muslims would offer different answers in trying to answer this peculiar question. How does Catholic teaching then reconcile truth and freedom? According to Catholic teaching religion is the choice of conscience of a person who – questioned by Jesus Christ and his message – decides to answer: yes! Persons are not born Christian but rather become Christian because of a personal choice. So here we have the place of birth as it were of a new right, a right unknown in the ancient world of Greece and Rome, the right of religious liberty.

At times in the history of Christianity this principle was obscured and almost eclipsed. However, it was never forgotten. Vatican II Council has the merit to have stated it anew in unmistakably clear terms with authority, Religious liberty is a right that "has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person." (*Dignitatis Humanae*)

Hence, "the religious freedom of every person, including the persons that do not have faith or that practice a faith that is different from mine, or, simply have given up faith. Thus, the freedom of non-Christians, in official, normative Catholic teaching, is co-essential with the claim that Christianity is the true

religion." At this point the contradiction between truth and liberty reveals that it is only an apparent contradiction. It is possible to fully participate in the free and open debate of civil society without giving up or marginalizing the claim that Christianity is the true religion, as the freedom of non-Christians is coessential with this claim.

From this there follow two consequences:

First, the recognition that a sound State requires a sound civil society strengthens the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. the principle according to which the State does not have to take on those tasks that can be performed equally well by the institutions of c. s., for example by associations and social movements. According to this principle of subsidiarity, the State has basically the task of providing the legal context and the economic support for developing civil society initiatives. In this way the State power is kept within its proper dimension, avoiding the State and its institutions growing out of proportion and over-developing in potentially dangerous ways.

Second, the central role recognized to civil society engages the Christian faithful to take on his or her responsibilities in the social and political fields. For centuries the Christian community has sought security in the confessional character of the State. State laws supporting Christianity and affirming the Christian character of the State were misunderstood as guarantee of the Christian character of society as well. This mistake had a negative impact on the vitality of the Christian community, as the responsibility of transforming society according to Christian values was regarded more a task of the State than the mission of each Christian and of Christian groups and associations in a free Society. The decline of State confessionalism and the prevailing of the principle that State institutions cannot be come instruments of any religion -- including the one professed by the majority of the citizens -- rather has encouraged Christians to take on the responsibility to witness to the values to be upheld in the places where people live, in schools, families, workplaces and so on.

2. The 'order' of the State and the 'order' of religion.

Civil society is rich and vital when the State does not absorb into itself all the duties and prerogatives, but instead actively promotes creativity and associated entrepreneurial activities from which the so-called 'intermediate bodies' can arise. These are structures of a collective nature which are managed by the citizens themselves. This vision affirms in a stronger way the centrality of man (and of the citizen) -- with its creative capacity to give a morally adequate response to the challenges of new historical situations.

But this vision has also a consequence concerning the relations between religions and the State. Accepting civil society as the privileged space for the fruitful expression of religions, also means that the principle of distinction between State and religions must be accepted. That means that religions belong to the sphere of civil society not to the sphere of State institutions. The distinction of the two 'orders' is very clear in the Christian tradition, in spite of the fact that for centuries it was blurred to some extent.

A correct secularity of the State is therefore meant as a *positive* value. It does not mean State hostility toward religion. On the contrary, a healthy secularism means that the state institutions do not identify themselves with a single religion or ideology, but are founded on a strong nucleus of shared values which find formal expression in the constitutional Charter and which safeguard the basic dignity of each citizen.

According to the Christian vision, this model of society is the most favorable to both religious life of individuals and communities and to the role played by religion in public. The fact of being autonomous, i.e. of being with directly political institutions allows religion to be fully itself. The positive influence of religion starts always from free choice by individuals and communities which diminishes every form of social and other pressures. A real religious choice (and the choice of religion) always is a question of freedom.

Conclusion

In a world in which practically every nation is marked by various forms of plurality we are called to build together our home for the future. Standing side by side, sharing responsibility for the success of his God-given task, the task

to build just and peaceful societies we feel encouraged and obligated by our faith to bridge the gulf of religious divisions in sincere collaboration by way of shared commitment in civil society activities within the framework of our democratic constrictions.

Finally I should like to refer to the point that was made by one speaker about to the ultimate fragility if not failure of human endeavor, whether on the level of our own, personal action or, on the collective level, on the scale of civilization. Our human endeavor will always fall short of our expectations. Such failure is always a painful reminder of human frailty, all the more deeply felt by someone who looks at the supernatural dimension of reality. But this should not lead us to despair. Our hope lies beyond. Our structures and institutions will always be ambiguous and imperfect, our civilizations condemned to decline and die. But fulfillment does not lie in the accomplishment of the ordering of the secular city. On the contrary, we should always keep in mind that true history, one which has meaning, is not accomplished within a space-time framework that can be empirically observed.

For their part Christians – and probably many Muslims as well -- are convinced that their faith opens up new dimensions of understanding, and above all that it helps reason to be itself. What is demanded of all believers is that they be coherent in their daily lives and confident that each moment in history is above all God's moment.

*Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Quest for Human Solidarity**

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal

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According to William James, "whenever two people meet, there are really six people present. There is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other person sees him, and each man as he really is." Human solidarity is best served when there is an earnest quest to know oneself and others in truth. Thus, when all our various selves congregate in a spirit of religious kinship, and as we engage in interfaith dialogue for the furtherance of human solidarity, it becomes important that such exchange not be seen as a dialogue between the faiths, but as a dialogue of believers in the faiths about issues of mutual human concern.

The objective of such dialogue is not to address the unassailable metaphysical beliefs that are particular to each faith, but to identify and share universal human values; for the human experience is what we all have in common, whereas the divine is diversely understood. Our common humanity must therefore be our starting point. Our common values cry out against the use of our fellow human beings as a mere means to an end.

Our faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – all affirm the non-ultimacy of economic and political considerations. They insist upon the ethical dimension and demand that humanitarian factors be placed at the forefront of all other considerations. They require a new kind of politics, capable of ending humanity's ancient wars against itself and against nature. This would be as Baroness Shirley Williams has said, "politics for the people," or *anthropolitics*, if you will.

When we speak of the ethics of human solidarity, it is impossible not to simultaneously talk of altruism, of interfaith as well as intra-faith outreach, of humane political and economic strategies (inclusive of poverty alleviation), of peace conditional on justice, of cultural security and identity, of universal codes of ethics to which all can subscribe, of conflict prevention and containment, of education, and of the all-important experiential component – the encounter with the 'other.' In other words, we have to be holistic in our quest to achieve greater levels

* Based on a lecture presented at the Royal Society of Edinburgh, February 4, 2002.

of human solidarity, addressing a multitude of tracks and pursuing multi-pronged operational strategies.

As a Muslim, I would like to share with you my personal understanding of Islam's relationship with other faiths. In the Qur'an, Islam recognises unequivocally Judaism and Christianity as revealed religions. For example, "Step by step, He has sent the scripture down to you [the Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down the distinction between right and wrong." (3:3) Furthermore, repeated throughout various *sura* (chapters) of the Qur'an, is the theme that God has created humankind to comprise many different communities, not as a monolith. The Qur'an states: "If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community, but they continue to have their differences." (11:118)

What place, then, does a variegated human experience of religion serve in the divine scheme of things? Why should God have ascribed to humankind religious diversity rather than religious unity? These are not simple questions, however, the Qur'an states "Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together." (2:148). This is God's command to all human communities on earth and is not addressed to Muslims alone.

An examination of Islamic exegesis reveals an overwhelming, though not unanimous, agreement on this point among the exegetes across the ages, beginning with Al-Tabari.¹ Cultural diversity and religious pluralism inspire healthy competition between communities and nations, and God enjoins us to direct that competition towards the common good.

This outlook presents us with a powerful version of the Qur'anic view of solidarity among the faiths. Solidarity, of course, cannot presume the adherence of the followers of one faith to the prescriptions and ordinances of another. On this point, the Qur'an is clear: "There shall be no compulsion in religion" (2:256), and "You have your own religion, and I have mine" (109:6). Solidarity among the faiths means that competing human communities strive for the good, strive to understand and reach out to one another in pursuit of a common human ethic and vision.

So how do communities of different faiths in fact reach out to one another, how do they co-exist, and how do they strive towards a common good? Select moments in history can be highlighted when co-existence and relative harmony have been possible. This is a worthwhile endeavour,

¹ Issa Boullata, "Fa-stabiqu'l - Khayrat: A Qur'anic Principle of Interfaith Relations", in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad eds. (University Press of Florida, 1995).

as history is replete with examples of unhappy encounters between members of the faiths. I draw on the findings of various academics to illustrate the possibilities for optimism.

Professor R. Marston Speight noted that even as the Fatimid Muslims and Byzantine Christians were locked in a struggle for supremacy in the Mediterranean, the Fatimid literature of the time was not devoid of respectful depictions of Christians living in the Muslim milieu.² It is noteworthy that Muslim chroniclers wrote objectively of Christians in their midst at a time of dire confrontation between members of the two faiths.

There are similar patterns of peaceful coexistence among the civilian populations, even as the Crusader armies faced their Muslim counterparts in combat in the 12th Century regions of Al-Sham – regions that include present-day Syria.³ Take for example, one account of the environment at the time when Salah al-Din (Saladin) commenced his attack on the fort of Karak in the mid-south of present-day Jordan:

Throughout the duration of the attack, the movement of caravans between Egypt and Syria continued unabated, as did that of the merchants between Damascus and Acre, and of Christian merchants through Muslim territory. The Muslims paid a tax to the Christians through whose lands they passed, while the Christian merchants paid a tax on their wares to the Muslims. Coexistence and moderation thus triumphed. While the armies clashed in battle, the civilians lived on in peace.⁴

There is as well the luminous example of Al-Andalus in the Middle Ages, where for close to eight centuries, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam co-existed and interacted, producing artistic, linguistic, philosophical and scientific advances so well known as to warrant little elaboration. The Andalusian experiment produced Maimonides and Judah ha-Levi among the many prominent Jewish thinkers, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Hazm among their Muslim counterparts. Christian officials at the Umayyad court would take Sunday as a day of rest and worship, and bishop and imam alike would be engaged in joint scholarly investigations.

² R. Marston Speight, *Christian-Muslim Relations: An Introduction for Christians in the United States of America* (Hartford, CT: National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1983).

³ Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Penny J. Cole, *Approaching Jerusalem: The Legacy of the Crusades in the 21st Century* (Regina: Campion College, 2000).

⁴ *Ibid.*

Sufism also had a profound influence on Jewish spirituality.⁵ The Andalusian age culminated in the emergence, with Ibn Rushd, of what Pierre Philippe Rey terms a "universalist rationalist thinking" that crossed over into France and on into the rest of Europe.⁶ There were also sizeable and significant migrations of Jews from Christian Europe to Ottoman lands. Spanish and Portuguese Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire where they flourished in numerous fields such as medicine, manufacture, commerce and banking, having brought with them the latest in European technology and methodology as they came in increasing numbers.

Islam is an extremely broad faith, with diverse institutions. It cannot possibly be understood in stereotypes. It is not unusual these days to read of Islam being described as a global threat, a menace to civilisation, a foreign phenomenon that should be shunned or confronted. Islam is no monolith now – it never has been. Muslim societies and expressions of faith have undergone centuries of change. To suggest distinct boundaries between civilisations is surely to ignore the ongoing debate about their very definition. There is a continuous process of interaction and dialogue between cultures. To presume that the identity of a civilisation never countenances change is to obscure centuries of synthesis and symbiosis. The long evolution and development of Muslim cultures contradicts the assumption that Islam labours under unbending theological rigidity. The four most fundamental values of the Holy Qur'an are justice (*'adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*), wisdom (*hikma*), and compassion (*rahma*).

For Muslims, the law of God represents absolute good. It is exercised in the service of God, and for the well-being of the community. It is eternal. The law of God pre-exists the community and its government. It is a perfect order which countenances no improvement. It is this idealised state that constituted the essence of the Prophet Muhammad's mission to the Arabs and to the rest of mankind.

The quest for this perfect order has, however, led Muslim rulers, theologians, thinkers and academics to seek its achievement in different ways. Given the inherent ambiguity of language, texts are bound to give rise to multiple interpretations. Any religious tradition which claims a substantial number of adherents is almost by definition a diverse institution. Of course it is possible to identify anti-pluralist tendencies within Islamic theory and history, running in tandem with pluralist ones. No doubt the same is true of any textually-based religion.

⁵ Haim Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing, 2005).

⁶ Pierre Philippe Rey, "Al-Andalus: Scientific Heritage and European Thought", in *The Routes of Al-Andalus: Spiritual Convergence and Intercultural Dialogue* (Paris: UNESCO, 1995).

Unfortunately, many commentators – whether scholars, politicians or media analysts – maintain that Islam is entirely hostile to the West and its matrix of cultures. Islam is often associated in contemporary media accounts with extremism, violence, and intolerance. When Muslims appear in the press, it is usually as the perpetrators of violence. At a time when Muslims comprise nearly three-quarters of the world's refugees, the innocent victims of conflict, this is a deeply disturbing trend.

Terrorism is not peculiar to any particular people; it is generally a manifestation of despair. Some Muslims are engaged in terror, as are some Christians, Jews, Hindus, secularists, and so on. But it is a grossly insulting act of reductionism to characterise the religious and spiritual aspirations of 1.2 billion human beings in this way. For while images of Muslim extremism may rule the media – especially photojournalism, which thrives on dramatic and gritty sensationalism – they are by no means universally accepted in the Muslim world as models of piety.

One of the immense challenges facing us all – indeed, one of the greatest hindrances to further solidarity – relates to the interpretation of difficult texts and negative references in our revealed scriptures. How do we handle them? How do we contextualise them historically as well as circumstantially, so that they are not taken to smear and indict entire peoples and serve the goals of those who wish to use them to justify eternal and monolithic characterisations of others? For years, voices – however remote – have risen from among the Jewish, Christian and Muslim clerical communities, calling for a bolder look at such texts.

A key issue to examine is the scope and nature of the work that can realistically and pragmatically be carried out to ensure that the exegesists and religious authorities of Jews, Christians and Muslims are kept in check and held to account by their adherents regarding what they disseminate from their respective pulpits and what interpretations they offer with regard to such difficult texts.

The power of such authorities and individual clerics wield in either promoting conciliatory attitudes or fomenting negative ones should not be underestimated, especially in certain cultures that are particularly prone to virtually revering their religious leaders and following their directives.

Consider as well the role of education in fostering greater human solidarity, dismantling psychological barriers and creating empathy among former antagonists. While formal education is essential in any quest aimed at fostering better Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations by replacing inaccurate with accurate information, as well as the minimisation of ignorance, due weight must be given to the psychological component of education, which is all too often caught up in acrimonious cycles of mutual blame and finger pointing. These cycles must be identified, intercepted, and addressed.

The identification of such pathways necessarily involves a thorough – if not occasionally tedious – examination of one's inherited as well as acquired 'perceptual sensory receptors' that predispose us to construct particular paradigms of attitudes towards individuals of other faiths and cultural backgrounds, or indeed attitudes towards an entire faith, both positive and negative.

In cases where such perceptions are constricted, monolithically dismissive and harsh – and by means of both education and the human encounter – it is hoped that people caught up in such cycles will then start realising the extent to which they had harboured largely unnecessary and redundant feelings and energies of exclusion, hate and fear.

In attaining the confidence and grace required to release some of those negative energies, they will invariably be less burdened by such morbidly powerful and depletive forces. Spiritual as well as behavioural equilibria then stand some chance of restoration as an outcome of perceptual revisionism. Essential in any prospect for such revisionism is the consolidation of one's own identity in an inclusivist manner free of fear, or the fear of threat that outreach might usher in.

This is why the study must be holistic in nature, for there is no denying that pre-set and acquired perceptions are shaped by a diverse and complex matrix of input-factors, such as a) socio-economic status (i.e. poverty, employment prospects, social dignity, etc.); b) where and how we grew up; c) cultural influences; d) patterns of interaction during early childhood and teen years; e) socio-educational experiences; and f) the prevalence of peace/stability or war/tension in places we lived in, among many other possibilities.

For education to stand a realistic chance of achieving its desired goals of ultimately fostering better relations and enlightened outreach among the three faith groups, it must be married off to the far more abstract concept of goodwill. Merely knowing about the other is by no means guaranteed to create better feelings and to dismantle generationally-ingrained negative attitudes. The best chance for this requisite goodwill to be generated is via the experiential component.

In more ideal circumstances, education would be poised to be most effective when it is grounded in positive personal relations and friendships. The goodwill generated therefrom will then function as the incentive and drive to sustainably use one's newly acquired education about the 'other' in the most innovative and constructive ways. This may well work among individuals and small groupings of people who have reached out across the religio-ethnic and cultural divides to embrace each other in friendship and trust, but can it work for entire communities, or indeed, nations?

The theory espoused and promulgated by numerous well-intentioned inter-faith and inter-cultural dialoguers and peace activists revolves around – in spirit, at least – the familiar notion that 'to know is to love'. That mutual awareness and knowledge – the often heralded fruits of education – help to humanise the other, creating a better understanding of one's fears and concerns, and eventually leads to empathy among former adversaries.

Of course, while this may be true as far as it goes, we must bear in mind that some of the bloodiest and most brutal conflicts have occurred between people who know each other only too well and have little mutual empathy as a result, including – alarmingly – co-religionists. For example, confrontation among co-religionists and co-nationalists: in the Caucasus, Christian Russia backed Muslim Abkhazia against Christian Georgia, while Muslim Iran played off Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan. The list continues – Ossetians against Georgians (both Christian), and Circassians against Karachai (both Muslim). Elsewhere, in Lebanon, savage battles raged between Muslims, Christians, and Druze, all of whom knew each other sufficiently well already, but the most savage of all battles often took place within each sect. In the Balkans too, where for each conflict pitting Muslims against Christians, there was another conflict involving co-religionists; for instance Moldovans versus Russians, Hungarians versus Romanians, Macedonians versus Greeks, Serbs versus Croats.

Familiarity, therefore, does not always eradicate enmity. It is perfectly possible for people to both know and hate each other. However, there is obvious validity to the point that ignorance leaves the door wide open to all species of misconceptions which would rule out harmonious co-existence.

Most conflicts end up taking on a religious colouring if only because the dividing lines between antagonists coincide with the religious divisions. These dividing lines are often *realpolitik* matters, such as feuding over territorial rights, natural resources, disparities in wealth, etc.

But what about the conflicts just mentioned, where the lines of antagonism do not always correspond to religious divisions? Does that not highlight the twin-poles of the problem? For example, we need to examine on the one hand how religion is caught up in conflicts grounded in actual or perceived socio-economic or territorial injustices, and on the other, the imperative of conducting not only inter-faith, but also intra-faith discourse. The role of 'perceptual revisionism' as an essential component of education, therefore, must examine reciprocal perceptions among Jews, Christians and Muslims.

In practical terms, what about education and mediums for education in a global context? One of the keys to successful education

lies in the immense potential of the information revolution and global communication. Members of the Abrahamic family of faiths can and must tap that great technological potential for the furtherance of the human solidarity we seek – circumventing the limitations of physical mobility and geographical constraints, while avoiding the pitfall of ignoring the neighbour next door. Furthermore, we must take the plunge, headfirst, and devise educational materials and methods – utilising all new technologies available – that are both informative, attractive and relevant.

Here is another challenge, as if extant ones are not enough. We must ensure that whatever is available, curricula-wise – in terms of the subject-areas relevant to the furtherance of human solidarity – not only remains intact and survives the gauntlet of budget cuts in times of financial crisis, but operational strategies must be diligently pursued in order to obtain a bigger slice of the curricula cake, using the most effective and engaging educational methods and technologies.

This is vital if shared ethics of human solidarity are to be successfully disseminated. The interactive nature of those technology-rich educational tools will ensure that what is disseminated may escape coming across as prescriptive, and therefore unappealing, but rather as mutually-engaging, and thus hopefully more palatable.

History is replete with examples of both positive and negative encounters between members of our respective faiths. What are we to make of this diverse historical record?

The possibility of a positive encounter is a matter of choice; the result of a concerted effort to bring out the very best of what religion has to say, maximising the chances of successful interaction. The choice is ours. We can reach out to each other, combat the scourges of ignorance and hate-mongery together towards a profitable co-existence, and compete in a fraternal spirit with one another in pursuit of the common human good that is also sensitive to the natural world we occupy. Such is my vision of solidarity among our great faiths.

The Quest for Common Ground: Themes in Islamic Thought

Presentation By Khaled H. Nusseibeh

I wish to extend my warm thanks to the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue Vatican City for inviting me to partake in the deliberations of this encounter involving a Muslim-Catholic dialogue. I, as a Jordanian, along with many other Jordanians, was impressed by the humanism and compassion of His Holiness Pope Benedict the 16th shown during his trip to the Holy Land of Jordan and Palestine.

I would like at the outset to quote the pithy words of the British historian, Arnold Toynbee, a scholar who possessed an unsurpassed panoramic view of human history:

"We are now moving into a chapter of human history in which our choice is going to be, not between a whole world and a shredded-up world, but between one world and no world. I believe that the human race is going to choose life and good, not death and evil."

Yes, ever since the industrial revolution and the advent of capitalism, the world has been driven towards interdependence and intimate interaction between all the societies, inhabitants and actors of the globe. Concomitant with this development have been ideological changes that have generally affirmed materialism, agnosticism, and a despiritualization and desacralization of knowledge and culture. Those developments, which were embodied in the Enlightenment in Europe have managed to spread throughout the world by means of colonial conquest and a revolution in communications. Also concomitant with the Enlightenment was a secular ethos that affirmed respect for human rights, democratic government, and the idea of social contract as the underpinning of political governance.

Today, the world faces a great challenge. Amidst the preponderance of materialism, hedonism and Dionysian tendencies, will culture reaffirm the belief in God as the underpinning of the human venture on earth? Or will it yield to a moral and religious relativism and disbelief that would perpetuate the odious proclamation of Nietzsche in the 19th century that 'God is dead? Surely, Christians and Muslims, adherents of the monotheistic faith, have a great role to play in salvaging human civilization from slipping into the abyss of atheism and universal doubt- a

joint venture that is rooted in a response to the call for a common word of belief in the oneness of God and love and respect for neighbor.

Feuerbach, the illustrious philosopher, posited the notion that humans should arrogate to themselves the attributes and qualities of God- that is, grounding human thought and consciousness in deified Man. Likewise, Marx asserted the idea that religion is the opiate of the people and was a precursor to secular revolutions that brought great suffering to human societies. In Germany, fascism, rooted in a deified national consciousness and a racialist conception of the universe and history, put humanity on a collision course which produced the Second World War.

Is it not the case that monotheist faith affirms the unity and brotherhood of mankind? The Quran says, "O mankind, we have created you from male and female, and made you into nations and tribes. Verily, the most honored among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing."

Likewise, Christian tradition, originally rooted in a monotheistic creed, affirms the equality and brotherhood of human races.

But out of intellectual honesty, should we not recognize that Islam and Christianity, while converging on the affirmation of the oneness of God, diverge over the matter of the Trinitarian doctrine of God which states that God is of three persons: the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Islam, while calling the respected People of the Book to a common word, underscores its rejection of conceiving of God in terms of paternity or as begetting a son. *قل هو الله أحد* Through a process of affirmation and negation, Islamic theology and epistemology drive a seeker of God to recognize Him as absolutely transcendent, preeternal, and Almighty. By corollary, any deified component of existence that does not fulfill the requirements of Divinity- its deification and worship should be negated as invalid. He is the first, the last, the apparent and hidden, to Him are the beauteous names.

In a world tormented by conflict, injustice and inordinate suffering, let us consider the idea of theodicy which connotes the vindication of God's goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil. A human mind is inclined to ponder this matter. The Pangloss of the French writer Voltaire is a vicious derision of the philosophically optimistic notion of theodicy. But, yes, as Christians and Muslims, we affirm it, given that the attribute of justice is intrinsic to the essence, being and conduct of God in this life and in eschatological existence. Both Christian and Muslims theologians have grappled with this issue. The response may take the form of: God is

Just; He commands justice and forbids evil; suffering in the human condition is the product of human folly; there is a veritable afterlife in which the perfect scales of justice will be applied. When people suffer, this is a manifestation of God testing them: will they endure, or will they commit unbelief and corruption?

Actually, Islam and Christianity converge on the issue of the immortality of the soul and the inevitability of resurrection. The Quran is rich in its description of the afterlife. In the Meccan period, the Qur'an entwines depictions of the Day of Judgment with exhortations to act justly and morally: I quote: "When the sun is coiled up, and when the stars become grimy, and when the mountains are set in motion, and when the pregnant camels are discarded, and when the wild beasts are mustered, and when the seas simmer, and when the souls are reunited, and when the girl-child buried alive is asked, for what reasons was she slain, and when the pages are spread open, and when the heaven is expunged, and when hellfire (al-Jahim) is set ablaze, and when the garden is brought near, every soul will then know what it has wrought, Nay, I swear by the slinking planets, the running planets covered by sunbeams, and the night when it darkens, and the dawn when it breathes; it is indeed the speech of a gracious Messenger." (Quran 81:1-19).

Thus the eschatological moment in the foregoing verses is entwined with the condemnation of worldly injustice. Humans may contribute to buttressing theodicy both intellectually and also in terms of the objective conditions of life. For instance, free trade, enterprise and toil foster the accumulation of wealth and alleviate poverty; education helps in undermining the deleterious effects of ignorance; accountability in political life and good governance help reduce corruption and lead to better living conditions for citizens; common human action to combat pornography and dehumanizing art (within a milieu of reasonable freedom) enhances the dignity of men and women and helps protect the family- that great human institution which Muslims and Christians alike believe in as the bedrock of civilization; freedom of expression nurtures the flourishing of culture and fosters political and social stability; economic freedom leads to the augmentation of wealth; scientific progress strengthens command over the physical and social environment and helps in curing illness, overcoming superstition, and drives economic growth..

Also related to the foregoing is the issue of free will and predestination. Allow me to quote the American scholar Ira Lapidus on this matter.."by the ninth century two basic positions had emerged in Muslim theology.

One was a rationalist oriented position that emphasized the centrality of reason as an ordering principle of God's being in the human understanding of the universe, and in the governance of human behavior. The rationalist position had, as its corollary, belief in free will and individual responsibility for moral choices. A contrary position stressed the absolute omnipotence and inscrutability of the divine being, who can be known only insofar as He has chosen to reveal himself through the Quran. This view denied the utility of reason in religious or moral choices. All human action is ultimately an expression of the power of the Creator rather than an autonomous exercise of free judgment and will." (A History of Islamic Society, pp.89). In the ninth and tenth century, Muslim theologians endeavored to postulate a middle ground between a position which gives excessive primacy to free will and another position which is radically predestinarian.

This theological issue has had reverberations on Muslim culture and society for many centuries. Modern Islamic reform movements have devoted extensive attention to it, considering radical predestinarianism as one of the main causes of Muslim and Arab decline. I personally believe that Islam encourages a proactive posture and perpetually calls to positive action; did the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) not say: "If doomsday should arrive while one of you has in his hand a small palm tree he should plant it." In effect, predestination should not be the refuge and justification for inaction and procrastination, but at the same time is compatible with trust in God.

The Indian philosopher Muhammad Iqbal remarked something to the effect that the ancient Greek mindset emphasized cognition through reasoning more than through an experience and apprehension of nature. Within the context of the Islamic view of God, it is undoubtedly the case that the Islamic method of inculcating the monotheistic view of God and life underlines reference to nature, the universe and man himself as vehicles of knowing God. This may be contrasted to a method that emphasizes metaphysical speculation and that attempts to unravel metaphysical or unseen reality through philosophical reflection- and not through empirical observation that ontologically ties contingent created existence to a unique Creator.

To illustrate the apprehension of monotheistic truth through a human striving for enlightened consciousness of God and the universe, I shall read for you the following Quranic verses describing Abraham's attainment of monotheistic faith by means of reflection on nature and the Universe:

"And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing credulity. And when night spread out over him he saw a star. He then said, "This is my Lord." But when it set he said, "I love not things that set." When he saw the moon rising, he said, "If God dies not guide me, I shall surely be among the perverse folk." Then when he saw the sun rising he said, "This is my Lord. This is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, I am free from that which you associate with God." (Quran 6:75-78)

In essence, therefore, Islam espouses a rigorously monotheistic view of God. The Quran rebukes associating or ascribing partners to God. He is One, without beginning or end, the Lord of the worlds and their sustainer. Islam's condemnation of idolatrous worship is categorical, while it considers the Christian Trinitarian doctrine as a deviation from the true monotheism taught by the Judeo-Christian prophets, including Jesus Christ (pbuh). Having said that it must be remembered that Islam regards with high esteem the Christian People of the Book (Ahl Al-Kitab), and affirms considerable parts of the Christian dispensation which Islam claims to have completed. It could be mentioned that belief in the Gospel and in Jesus the son of Mary is part of the Muslim creed, as is the miraculous conception of Jesus. (quoted from a lecture delivered by the speaker in 2004 at the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman) The latter should indeed be part of the common ground between Muslims and Catholics in an age when people deny the possibility of the miraculous. But the question may be posed: is not the God who created the universe and instilled in it His laws capable of suspending or violating those laws?

With your indulgence, I would like to read to you a poem which I wrote which touches on some of the themes in this presentation.

Stations of Galaxies

I do not swear by the stations of galaxies
For a question unveils the secret of oath

Does the moon in splendor forever glimmer?
And doesn't it in complete form recoil to a crescent?

The sun at noon with brilliance shines
But sinks in reddish orange at a distant horizon

The stars illumine a darkness of intense depth

But fade from the view of earthly life

Pyramids stoutly stand with magnificent posture
But are immensely below the nearest cloud

Abraham exclaims revolt at vanishing splendor
Affirming that God is without twilight

I do not swear by the stations of galaxies
For being is conditional on Almighty God

The tallest wave on the shore's sand breaks
Yielding to numbers of succeeding waves

Michelangelo's David stuns the viewing eye
Exceeded by the creations of other men of art

The sea waves and earth bow to the Macedonian's conquest
But death chooses to its site the finest general

Athena makes each citizen a member of the jury
But history's indomitable verdict is that are have an end

I do not swear by the stations of galaxies
For finite life overwhelms all that lives

THE IDENTITY AND PRESENCE OF RELIGION IN A SECULAR CULTURE

Joseph Ellul, O.P.

Today's Western societies and European societies in particular, are characterized both by mass-immigration, which undoubtedly leaves its mark on the native culture, and by an increasing alienation which has revealed the profound emptiness lying at its heart after decades of secularism.

It is true that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 did not only lead to the re-unification of the two Germanys, but also to the re-discovery of Eastern Europe together with the spiritual ideals that it had preserved in spite of decades of oppression.¹ But the fall of the last bastion of the absolute secular state embodied in communism, has not only led to a political and social vacuum, but also a psychological and a spiritual challenge. After decades of fostering a mentality of survival, these societies have experienced freedom as if they had been exposed to a cultural explosion. They have found themselves totally unprotected from the developments that had taken place in Western Europe during the preceding decades. They have found themselves encountering a culture driven by unbridled and merciless market forces and especially by consumerism which are leading to another more subtle and, consequently, more dangerous form of totalitarianism. In many ways even

¹ In his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II dwelt upon the reasons underlying the crisis within communism itself which eventually led to its downfall:

It is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone, nor to define him simply on the basis of class membership. Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated within the sphere of culture through his language, history, and the position he takes towards the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. When this question is eliminated, the culture and moral life of nations are corrupted. For this reason the struggle to defend work was spontaneously linked to the struggle for culture and for national rights.

But the true cause of the new developments was the spiritual void brought about by atheism, which deprived the younger generations of a sense of direction and in many cases led them, in the irrepressible search for personal identity and for the meaning of life, to rediscover the religious roots of their national cultures, and to rediscover the person of Christ himself as the existentially adequate response to the desire in every human heart for goodness, truth and life. This search was supported by the witness of those who, in difficult circumstances and under persecution, remained faithful to God. Marxism had promised to uproot the need for God from the human heart, but the results have shown that it is not possible to succeed in this without throwing the heart into turmoil.

Centesimus Annus, n. 24.

modern western culture has become a culture of survival. Christopher Dawson was prophetic when sixty-five years ago he made the following reflection on the reasons behind the disintegration of a civilization:

A civilization which concentrates on means and neglects almost entirely to consider ends must inevitably become disintegrated and despiritualized.

Our democratic societies have done this, by devoting all their planning to the technical and industrial organization and leaving the sphere of culture to the private initiative of individuals, i.e. to unplanned activities. This was possible before the machine age, when the ruling class in society consisted of men of property in the old sense, men with a fixed economic background and a tradition of leisure, not unlike the citizen class of antiquity. But when this class had lost its economic foundation and was progressively absorbed into the machine order, it ceased to be culturally creative.²

Cultural paranoia and schizophrenia

Whereas Eastern Europe under communism had been throughout the second half of the twentieth century a closed society subject to a paranoid rejection of "decadent"³ culture and a projected schizophrenic illusion of living in a terrestrial proletarian paradise, Western Europe was, at the same time undergoing radical mutations in its culture which have led towards the dismantling of human values culminating in a veritable crisis of identity. This latter element has now come to the fore by way of the recent phenomenon that has hit the European continent. The waves of immigration from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa as well as from what used to be called the Indian sub-continent, have not only caught European societies unawares, but have also nurtured as a by-product a growing culture of extreme rightist groups who feed on and develop an altered form of paranoia, namely xenophobia. On the other hand, consumerism has become a cult, resulting from the inner human need for fulfillment without the bonds and accouterments demanded by religion. Thus product advertising seeks to tap this unquenchable craving. It thrives on discontent transforming the trivial into a vital necessity, thereby creating an alternative schizophrenic society wherein humanity becomes

² Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*, Sheed & Ward, New York 1942, p. 118f.

³ Communism's definition of the non-communist western bloc.

mesmerized by an outer shell of lights, graphics, and subliminal messages, while remaining empty of moral values.

This is also reflected in the sharp decrease in quality time that the family allows itself in order to encounter and interact as a family. Television stations are continuously feeding the family a diet of soap operas, big-brother shows and sitcoms that reflect very little of real life situations, but delight in intrigue, betrayal, loose relationships, and a clear rejection of responsibility, accountability, commitment and fidelity. Children (and the not-so-young) are engrossed in video-games that cut them off from reality altogether, spending hours living in a surreal world that makes them more introverted and uncommunicative. It is well known that the prime reason for marital breakdown is, in fact, a total breakdown in communication. Even messages sent and received on mobile phones and e-mails are coded, detached, and impersonal. In many ways the real is being replaced by the virtual.

In the employment sector competition is paramount. Employees are being continuously badgered to fulfill the sometimes unreasonable expectations demanded by their employers with some companies even setting up quotas that could not possibly be reached. There is nothing wrong with aspiring to become successful; without success there is no progress. The problem arises when success is transformed from an aspiration into a cult. A cult of success confers no status whatsoever on the unsuccessful. We are therefore witnessing increasing marginalization that is culminating in violence, especially in the suburbs of the main cities.

Business concerns have recently begun to tap into the so-called "post-religious age". One such case is the Christmas season. The Birmingham City Council has gone so far as to propose that Christmas be renamed "Winterval" which, according to its members, would supposedly recreate a more multicultural atmosphere in keeping with the city's mix of ethnic groups.⁴ Both moves were severely criticized by both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Westminster. Christmas cards portraying the Holy Family are fast becoming a thing of the past. Snowmen, doves and scenes of some snow-covered countryside are taking their place; all this in the name of

⁴ See http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/210672.stm

political correctness and the supposed fear of alienating or offending adherents of other religions.⁵

The reason being given for this shift is that today Europe is a multi-cultural society and one must not seek to give precedence to one religion over another, the latter being presumably Islam. On this point, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) has made the following judicious reflection:

Muslims feel threatened, not by the foundations of our Christian morality, but by the cynicism of a secularized culture that denies its own foundations... it is not the mention of God that offends those who belong to other religions; rather it is the attempt to construct the human community in a manner that absolutely excludes God.⁶

Furthermore, modern culture tends to portray the human individual as one endowed with rights in counter-position to society and government which have duties to fulfill.⁷ This creates a deeper alienation and a lack of consciousness on the part of the former in the endeavour to build a more human society.

The significance and limits of secular culture

For all the criticism one might level at it, in the past religion made life somewhat more tolerable. The choice it laid before human beings regarding the afterlife brought hope to the weak, the poor, and the marginalized and demanded responsibility, accountability and generosity on the part of the powerful.⁸

⁵ See <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6120858.stm>

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2006, p. 33

⁷ Jonathan Sacks explains this frame of mind in the following way:

...our moral imagination is bounded by three central themes – autonomy, equality and rights – the values that allow each of us to be whatever we choose...

We know that not all choices are wise. But we are reluctant to let that fact serve as a basis for a moral conclusion. Instead we make a distinction between acts and consequences. Acts are freely chosen; consequences are dealt with by the state. So governments are there to treat AIDS, child abuse, homelessness, and addiction, but not to disseminate a morality that might reduce them in the first place.

Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1991, p.

42.

⁸ See, for example the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Lk. 16:19-31.

When religion is edited out of a culture *everything* becomes permitted. This is especially true not only of social marginalization where the unemployed, the poor and the destitute are considered as nothing more than an eyesore from which we should be shielded, but also of the road taken by scientific research in the realm of in-vitro fertilization, cloning and stem-cell research. The initial arguments all adopt the same tactic and follow the same pattern of tugging at the heartstrings. In-vitro fertilization gives hope to married couples who are childless, cloning opens vast possibilities in order to feed millions of hungry people worldwide, while stem-cell research using human embryos could help cure crippling conditions such as cancer, Alzheimer's, motor-neuron diseases, and so forth. There is never any talk about how much bio-technology and pharmaceutical companies stand to gain by all of this, nor of the ultimate objectives of those funding such projects. One could permit such research with legislation that clearly defined the bounds within which it was to take place. However, even stringent restrictions would be pointless. Within a few years these same restrictions would be written off as obscurantist and would be systematically dispensed with altogether. In other words, if you leave the front door of your home ajar, you might as well have left it wide open. In-vitro fertilization, cloning and stem-cell research have ultimately reduced the human being to a commodity. Consequently, our brave new world could well be transformed into a *brave new nightmare* just as Aldous Huxley had predicted. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was not merely a classic gothic novel; it was also a parable. Today it could well become a reality.

During the past century, especially, the possibilities available to humanity for dominion over this world (and beyond) have increased in a manner that is truly unimaginable. But the very fact of the existence of such human power also unleashes demonic possibilities for self-destruction. At this point one might also mention the threat of terrorism, this new war without national borders and without the conventional use of national armies. The fear that terrorists may get hold of nuclear and biological weapons has induced some states to legislate in a way that even twenty years ago was suitable only to totalitarian regimes. The moral philosopher Sir Jonathan

Sacks put this situation succinctly in the following seemingly apocalyptic statement:

We might well feel that the whole thrust of the scientific imagination when applied to human culture was not so much to elevate man to the status of a god, but to reduce him to the quintessence of dust and brand all else an illusion. If so, we would have had our first intimation that what seemed so liberating about a post-religious age might be no more than a narrowing of human possibilities.⁹

Contemporary man is in search of salvation (not exclusively in the religious sense).¹⁰ He is in search of his own freedom... and sometimes of freedom from himself.

A clash of fundamentalisms

This leads us to contemplate another scenario that is unfolding in Europe today and which is intimately linked with the above-mentioned problem of lack of respect, namely the clash between religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism.

Religious fundamentalists are fundamentally lazy as believers. This does not mean that they are not zealous; quite the contrary, they are zealous in the extreme. Their laziness lies in the false sense of security, which they find in their religious convictions. Their interpretation of scripture lacks dynamism, their doctrinal teachings lack insight, their moral instruction is laden with

⁹ Jonathan Sacks, *op. cit.*, p. 31. Already back in 1982 the late Jean-Marie Lustiger, then Cardinal Archbishop of Paris had spoken the following equally prophetic words during a speech he delivered at the École Polytechnique in Paris:

While Western Civilization was achieving the goals it had determined, pretending or naively thinking that in such a manner it brought happiness to all and a reasonable way of life in justice, right, and equity, in appeared in fact that this triumphant human reason begat its very opposite. Technical progress does undoubtedly bring a better mastery of the world, but also the capacity to destroy it. Economical progress offers a better possibility to fulfill the needs of people, but at the same time it exacerbates the desire of some and increases everybody's sensitivity to the problem of injustice. Mastery over the human body increases the ability to cure or control biological mechanisms, but at the same time robs persons of any norm of behaviour toward their body or the bodies of others: the maddest dreams of the Auschwitz physicians have now become subjects of studies and banal experimentation in some medical laboratories.

Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, *Dare to Believe*, St. Paul Publications, Middlegreen 1986, p. 112.

¹⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx refers to salvation as "the conquest of all human, personal and social alienations; salvation is man's wholeness, his world and his history." Edward Schillebeeckx, *CHRIST – The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, SCM Press, London 1980, p. 814.

norms and precepts. There is no room for diversity or dissent, personal initiative or creativity. The world appears to be divided into two opposing positions: those "out there", who are destined to perdition, and those "in here" who are called to be saved. Religious fundamentalism does not accept faith as a dynamic principle that gives life and movement to the human spirit. It does not allow space for the human soul to pose searching questions about life and about the human situation and that the answers given might not be satisfactory.

Secular fundamentalists, on the other hand, dismiss religion *tout court* as the bearer of obscurantism. Their outright refusal to understand faith and Europe's faith heritage denies to all the opportunity to understand why religious people act the way they do in response to issues ranging from the Muslim headscarf, to the Danish cartoon controversy, to the now defunct European constitution, to Madonna's aping Christ crucified, to the broadcasting of *Jerry Springer: The Opera*.

Contrary to secularity, secularism is not happy with the mere drawing of the distinction between religion and state and the necessity on the part of both to maintain their autonomy while at the same time collaborating for the common good. As a movement secularism is bent on desecrating all those symbols and beliefs that religious people hold dear, and which they consider an integral part of their life and role in society. It does not limit itself to criticizing religious beliefs and attitudes; it enthusiastically holds them up to public ridicule in order to humiliate them and, subsequently, edit them out of existence *permanently*. At the height of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, the *Jyllands-Posten* came up with a cartoon depicting St. Joseph pointing an accusing finger at the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus in her arms. The caption below it read: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman!". Long before the film *Submission* was aired on Dutch television, Theo van Gogh had already caused many an uproar by pouring scorn and abuse on Dutch Jews¹¹ and by calling Jesus Christ "that rotten fish from Nazareth".¹²

¹¹ He once attacked Leon De Winter, a filmmaker and novelist and the son of orthodox Jewish parents, in an article which he penned for the movie magazine *Moviola*. In it he wrote that De Winter could only satisfy his wife by wrapping barbed wire around his penis and crying "Auschwitz!" when he reached climax. See Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam*, Atlantic Books, London, 2006, p. 90.

¹² See *op. cit.*, p. 91.

Secular society does not allow for openly religious people to be seen as normal and well-adjusted. There always seems to be a desire to pigeon-hole them as semi-rational, spiritual fifth columnists. This attitude has been painfully made clear by former prime minister Tony Blair's admission during an interview on the BBC One series *The Blair Years* that "you talk about it [religion] in our [British] system and, frankly, people do think you're a nutter". This was confirmed by his former spokesman Alastair Campbell – known for having once told reporters: "We don't do God" – when he stated that the UK electorate were "a bit wary of politicians who go on about God".¹³

Our media and self-proclaimed opinion leaders relish the prospect of branding people instead of ideas, manipulating quotes and extrapolating them from their context in order to create maximum effect and in the process boost the number of viewers, listeners and readers. Far from presenting an objective account they thrive upon the dictum: don't let the facts get in the way of a good story. If it concerns taking a religious stance, then its presentation must be all the more appealing to sensationalism. Jonathan Sacks describes the situation in the following manner:

Lacking a shared language, we must attack the arguer, not the argument. This is done by ruling certain opinions out of order, not because they are untrue – there is no moral truth – but because they represent an assault on the dignity of those who believe otherwise. So Christians are homophobic. People on the political right are fascist. Those who believe in the right of Jews to a state are racist. Those who believe in traditional marriage are heterosexist. Political correctness, created to avoid stigmatizing speech, becomes the supreme example of stigmatizing speech.¹⁴

Religion and Civilization

A society in decline has its own prophets of doom, but also its prophets of revival. It might create a cultural vacuum but it might also foster small dynamic cells seeking a new meaning for human existence and purpose for humanity.¹⁵ Sooner or later there must be a revival of culture and a

¹³ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_news/politics/7111620.stm published on 25th November 2007.

¹⁴ Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society*, Continuum Books, London 2007, p. 42.

¹⁵ This concept was first introduced by Alasdair McIntyre in his seminal work *After Virtue* and adopted by Sir Jonathan Sacks in his book *The Persistence of Faith*. It later surfaces, albeit with a Christian interpretation in a European context in the works of Cardinal

reorganization of the spiritual life. If our increased control over the environment and our greater material resources are simply devoted to the quantitative multiplication of our material needs and gratifications, our societies are doomed to end in a morass of collective self indulgence, and that is precisely what is taking place around us. However, as Arnold Toynbee had pointed out in his judicious assessment of history; the decline of a society sows the seeds of a truly spiritual rebirth.¹⁶

Human history undergoes a systematic pattern of ascent, decline, decadence, lethargy and alienation. Most western societies are, indeed, weary societies. Many of its citizens lack the strength to continue posing the two most fundamental questions in life: "Who am I?" and "What is my purpose in life?" It is only by having a clear vision of one's proper identity and purpose that one can begin to look forward towards building a better future.

Joseph Ratzinger (today Pope Benedict XVI) especially in the book which he co-authored with Marcello Pera, *Without Roots*.

¹⁶ Arnold Toynbee explains this phenomenon with expert precision in the following words:

... since the rise of the higher religions, Man's never-ceasing spiritual quest has not been fruitless. It has borne out Aeschylus's dictum that 'suffering is the key to learning'. During the age of human history that the rise of the higher religions has inaugurated, recurrent mundane catastrophes have been the occasions for successive spiritual advances.

The inverse variation of Man's secular and religious fortunes is illustrated by the history of Judaism. The age that saw the destruction of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah was also the age of the Prophets. The deportation of the leaders of the Jewish community to Babylonia saw the creation, in exile of a Judaism, associated with a new institution, the synagogue, which has superseded the earlier form of Jewish religion that was bound up with a ritual that could be performed only in the Temple at Jerusalem. The destruction of the Temple in AD 70 gave occasion for Johanan ben Zakkai to endow Judaism with a form that it still retains today.

The same pattern of relations between the religious and the secular sides of human life is also illustrated by the history of the three missionary higher religions. Christianity and Islam both sprang from a 'culture compost' that had been produced by the intermingling of the débris of the disintegrated Syriac and Hellenic Civilization. The Buddha attained his enlightenment, and imparted his spiritual discovery to his disciples in an age in which his and their ancestral Indic civilization was falling into a time of troubles.

The 'sorrowful round' of the recurrent vicissitudes of civilization has carried the higher religions forward in a spiritual movement that has been, not cyclical, but progressive. If we ask ourselves why the descending movement in the revolution of the wheel of civilization has carried the chariot of religion forward and upward, we shall find our answer in the truth that religion is a spiritual activity; for spiritual progress is governed by the law proclaimed by Aeschylus in the words already cited, and by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the verse: 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.'

Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London 1972, p. 350.

As the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has pointed out, “we are living in a period of great dangers and of great opportunities both for man and for the world, a period that also imposes a great responsibility on us all.”¹⁷ Today we also happen to live in a multi-religious society that is constantly confronting and challenging the hitherto uncontested dogmas of our secularist culture. We are just beginning to realize that economic, scientific, and technological are not enough to build a healthy society. When progress in these areas becomes an end in itself, human dignity is the first to suffer the dire consequences.

Nowhere is this fear more greatly felt than in the realm of education and in the increasing popularity of faith-based schools in a profoundly secular culture. More and more parents are refusing to have their children taught by fashionable methods that leave them bereft of knowledge and skills. They do not want their children to have self-esteem at the cost of self-respect, won by hard work and genuine achievement. Parents do not want their children to be taught that every difference of behaviour reflects an equally valid lifestyle. They do not want their children to be moral relativists, exploring all cultures without being at home in any of them. Parents do not want to take the risk of their children taking drugs or consuming alcohol or becoming sexually promiscuous, still less becoming teenage parents.

Many parents do not entertain the scenario of an ever widening gap between their children's values and their own. They do not want moral values undermined by a secular, sceptical, cynical culture. Nor do they believe that the latter can be counteracted by places of worship, supplementary schooling and domestic life. The values of wider secular culture are not confined to school. They are present in the increasingly obtrusive media of television, the internet, YouTube, MySpace, and the icons of popular culture. Consumerism, relativism, a moral free-for-all – these are not the values which they want their children integrated *into*. On the contrary, these are what they want their children to be protected *from*.¹⁸

Religion has a right to a voice in the public domain without its being dismissed out of hand or its teachings being ridiculed as out of touch with the

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2006, p. 25.

¹⁸ Sacks, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

demands of modern society. Such an attitude can be as obscurantist as that of a theocracy.

The problem lies not in that religious people have abandoned society: it is that they feel society has abandoned them. Rightly or wrongly, they feel that society has been hijacked by single-issue lobbies, a cosmopolitan-cynical media élite, and fashionable so-called 'postmodern' doctrines, and that to protect themselves and their children they must turn away from society toward a local community: a church, temple, synagogue or mosque.¹⁹

Religion and the Future of Society

Herein lies the fundamental question posed by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*: What may we hope? Both modernity and religion need to open themselves to self-critique. Religion does not fear technological progress; what it fears is technological progress that is divorced from ethical formation. The triumph of reason does not lie in its detachment from God but through its "openness to the saving forces of faith, to the differentiation between good and evil."²⁰ The moral well-being of humanity can never be guaranteed solely and exclusively through structures. It requires communities that are animated by convictions capable of motivating people to assent freely to the social order.²¹ Religion's special power lies precisely in creating such communities. It teaches us those ideals towards which we should strive for the benefit of all. It teaches us how to construct and direct human relations from an attitude of utility to one of love, truth, justice and respect that serve the common good of society.²²

Religion teaches its members to be good and loyal citizens in this world in order to pave the way for the next. The famous dictum, "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country"²³ is as much a religious statement as it is a political one.

¹⁹ See, for example the article by Neil MacFarquhar entitled *Many Muslims Turn to Home Schooling in The New York Times*, 26th March 2008.

²⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 23.

²¹ *Id.*, *op. cit.* n. 24.

²² See *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

²³ As is well known, this phrase has been taken from John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in January 1961. However it was originally coined by Gibran Khalil Gibran in his work *The New Frontier*, published in 1925, in which he wrote the following:

Are you a politician asking what your country can do for you or are you a zealous one asking what you can do for your country? If you are the

Every religion draws its strength not only from the doctrines and moral principles that it teaches, but also from the families it helps nurture, preserve, protect, and defend. Without a strong family structure we cannot hope to promote human rights and dignity, still less build a healthy society where rights are balanced by duties and freedom is tempered by responsibility. The family is the matrix of individuality. In the bonds of mutual love and fidelity that are forged within it we discover a highly differentiated sense of who we are. It is therefore not surprising that totalitarian regimes, both on the right and on the left of the political spectrum, have always sought to wrest authority over children from their parents. The family is as much a religious institution as it is a social one, perhaps even more so.

Although religion and the secular state are distinct domains both have the duty to collaborate towards a more human and a more caring society.²⁴ A rediscovery of religion would go a long way towards healing our fragmented societies. As Jonathan Sacks rightly points out:

~~Religions are the structures of our common life. In their symbols and ceremonies, the lonely finds communion with others who share a past and a future and a commitment to both. In their visions we discover the worth of un-self-interested action, and find, in the haunting words of the Rabbi of Kotzk, that God exists wherever we let him in.²⁵~~

It is true that religion today has become a battleground for diverse understandings of the human person, God, this earth, and the relation between the three. But even underneath these conflicts we are witnessing a common endeavour, which indicates a spiritual hunger that cannot be eliminated from society. We see these forces reappearing, or better resurfacing, in those countries where, for several generations, powerful counter-forces attempted to suppress them. These are indications that we are not living and can never live in a totally secularized culture; on the contrary, a new form of religious culture is evolving. Once again religion is having a renewed influence on societal issues, and this role will continue to expand.

first, then you are a parasite; if you are the second, then you are an oasis in the desert.

See <http://4umi.com/gibran/frontier/>

²⁴ See *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 40-43. See also Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Secretary General and members of the Coordinating Administrative Committee of the UN*, Rome, 7th April 2000.

²⁵ Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith*, p. 93.

However, in spite of our efforts and our talents we must accept the fact that the final results of our action will necessarily reveal a certain degree of failure, whether on the level of our own, personal action or, on the collective level, on the scale of civilization. Our endeavour will always fall short of our expectations. Such failure always is a painful reminder of human frailty, all the more deeply felt by someone who looks at the supernatural dimension of reality. But this should not lead us to despair. Our hope lies beyond. Our structures and institutions will always be ambiguous and imperfect, our civilizations condemned to decline and die. But fulfillment does not lie in the accomplishment of the ordering of the secular city. On the contrary we should always keep in mind that true history, one which has meaning, is not accomplished within a space-time framework that can be empirically observed.²⁶

For their part Christians are convinced that their faith opens up new dimensions of understanding, and above all that it helps reason to be itself. What is demanded of Christians is that they be coherent in their daily lives and confident that each moment in history is above all God's moment. Modernity should not be the cause of fear, but a challenge to live up to one's faith and find in it the realization of human dignity and purpose. Here we would do well to constantly recall the timely and insightful words of Ignace Lepp:

The Christian's attitude to all other creatures must be like that of the priest at the altar. He knows that through him, through his daily activity, the whole world is consecrated to God. The sorrows and failures of life are for him no meaningless vexations, for he knows that they also contribute to God's great work: we know, with St. Paul, that all things work together for good for those who love God.

The believer must never be complacent, for complacency is closely akin to death. Because he is aware of his mission as God's collaborator the believer can be content with no given or contrived situation. The present must forever be overtaken by the new. The Christian, in a truer and greater sense than the Trotzkyist, is a "permanent revolutionary."²⁷

²⁶ H.I. Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*, translated by Violet Nevile, Sheed & Ward, New York 1969, p. 177f. This concept had already been highlighted by St. Augustine (354-430) in his masterpiece *De civitate Dei*.

²⁷ Ignace Lepp, *The Challenges of Life*, Alba House, Staten Island, New York 1969, p. 197.

Forty years ago radical theologians took perverse pleasure in proclaiming the death of God; today a serious and considered approach would bring us to the conclusion that in the human search for transcendence we have just begun to take our first steps.

Joseph Ellul O.P.

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*THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND CIVIL SOCIETY
ACCORDING TO CHRISTIANITY*

Rev. Prof. Andrea PACINI

A provisional text

1) Theological and anthropological foundations.

“For us, our homeland is in heaven, and from heaven comes the Saviour we have been waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Phil 3, 20*)

Paul’s statement seems to be a paradox; Christians live on the earth and in historical time, but Paul invites them to consider themselves citizens of heaven. But precisely because of this apparent paradox, St Paul’s statement is able to offer us a useful starting point for understanding what is the relationship between religion and civil society according to Christianity.

In the first place, the sentence confirms that a Christian’s ‘homeland’ is not on this earth, but in heaven: thus it underlines the fact that a Christian belongs in the first place to God. The Bible reveals to us that men and women were created by God to live a life project characterised by communion: communion with God and mutual

communion with each other. This is the fundamental meaning of life at the beginning of creation: in the Garden of Eden harmony is triumphant, harmony between man and woman and harmony in nature. Communion and friendship with God, who walks in the garden Himself and speaks directly to man, is fundamental to this harmony. This is all deeply symbolic and intended to suggest a situation of deep relational harmony between the Creator and His creatures.

This original harmonious relationship, which expresses communion between the Creator and man and woman – within the framework of complete harmony among all creation – was, however, destroyed by sin. Sin expresses man's rebellion against God, the wrong use of his free will, that faculty most typical of human nature. Free will is, moreover, the faculty which renders man 'like' God: man is called to love God and to love his neighbour, but only free will renders love possible. As God is free in His sovereignty and freely loves with infinite love, so man – being finite – is given real free will – given to him by God – in order to live freely, in a responsible way, the expression of true love, the relationship with God and with other men. In his freedom man is made responsible and capable of true love.

At the level of created things, however, freedom means choice: man lives out his freedom through his choices; man lives out his communion identity by freely choosing to love, thereby choosing to enter into a harmonious relationship of 'listening', of obedience in respect of the other. But biblical revelation tells us that man's choice was changed by an act of autonomy and disobedience towards God. Instead of accepting his place within this relationship with God – and thus recognising God's primacy in his life – man set himself up as equal to God. In this sense he wanted to "play God": in the sense, that is, that man affirmed his own autonomy and considered himself to be the last reference for his choices. Instead of living in a relationship with God where God's primacy is recognised, man has entered into competition with God, breaking the relationship of close communion with Him.

We are not dealing here simply with the breaking of a norm or a law or of specific disobedience with regards to an order. It is a matter of going contrary to the expression of a fundamental existential relationship: in his disobedience man has set himself up as self-determining; he has withdrawn himself from a relationship with God based on listening in faith; man, who was created for such communion, has withdrawn himself from this relationship with God which formed the taproot and horizon of his whole being.

From this original sin is derived not only the breaking of communion with God, but, at the same time, the breaking of communion with other men and of man with himself. In fact the Bible presents us directly with the fact that the man and the woman accuse each other of responsibility for the sin, are separated, enter into conflict, and are both 'ashamed' and hide themselves when they hear the voice of God calling to them: they are ashamed, that is they lose the relationship of communion and peace with themselves. Sin separates us from God, and at the same time creates divisions between men, and creates division and discord within man himself.

The capacity to love becomes fragile, because human love is fragmented and directed towards many desires, and is expressed more in possession – of people, of things – than in the free offering of self which communion generates. In this way freedom is seduced by multiple attractions, and finds expression more in possessing and dominating than in the gift of self which is communion.

The Bible tells us that another fruit of sin is a diminution in man's capacity to know God. All Creation reveals the existence and the grandeur of God, but man has turned towards the created rather than to the Creator, and risks living solely in the historic present, which ends with death.

The Bible also tells us, however, that God in His mercy has not abandoned man in his sin, but has put into effect a saving action, salvation: God has met man in history, making Himself known to man. God has revealed to man his Word, so that man can learn to know not only God, but also himself, in the light of God. Not only this, God also promises a definitive salvific intervention, through which He means to bring man himself back to health, renewing him from within, purifying him from the sin which corrupts him, in order to restore to man the capacity to love in communion, and thus to live in communion with God, with other men and with himself.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God which became man and lived in historical time; the Eternal Word, which becoming man, lived in total loving obedience to the Father. Living this loving obedience in his life and in his death, Jesus Christ triumphs over the forces of sin, disobedience and man's autonomy and leads humanity back to full communion with God. In the person of Jesus Christ, God and man are in perfect communion; in the mystery of the death of Christ, his obedience to God – over man's sin – reaches a culminating point, which is one with the gift of his life for love of the Father and of his fellow men. Every bit of human egoism is vanquished. And this gift of self in love and full freedom triumphs in the Resurrection. The communion which Christ experienced in the drama of the crucifixion, triumphs with force in his resurrection. In the resurrection the freedom of his love and faith in God triumphs, and Christ becomes the source of forgiveness and grace of a new life for all men. In Him it becomes possible for man to live again as a son of God, in communion with God, with himself and with other men, because in Christ God offers forgiveness of sins and the gift of a renewed capacity to love.

God is love, in fact, and in Him is the source of love and of life. In Christ this source of love and life is made accessible to us, because united with Him and in Him, we live our own lives in communion with God recognised as Father and other men recognised as brothers. The freedom with which Christ lives his obedience to the Father and his love for his brothers, gives us our own freedom from the ties of sin, which enslave us and make us un-free. In Christ our freedom is freed: sustained by grace it becomes capable of choosing and accepting true good.

2) The believer's place in history

Paul's statement that our homeland is in heaven from whence comes the Saviour we have been waiting for, Jesus Christ, thus underlines a particular Christian concept about man and about history. History does not have immanent significance, but finds its meaning in relation to transcendence, in relation to God, who is the origin and end of history. And this is true both for universal history and for our own personal histories. Creation comes from God and it is ultimately destined to return to full communion with Him; men come from God and are called to return to Him.

History is the history of encounter between God and mankind – by means of revelation – and for this reason is the story of salvation, because it finds its guide and its meaning in God. For Christians to state that our homeland is in heaven means to state that God loves us, and takes care of us – a love and a care which have taken on a particular face: Jesus Christ – and that we are called to communion with Him, and through this communion we are established as his sons.

To state that “we are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour” means to emphasize that history is running towards its end, which is full recapitulation in God through the Lord Jesus Christ. History is not eternal, it does not develop in continuous repetition of cosmic cycles: it is ultimately directed for the purpose of salvation, of full communion with God, which in the person of Christ has already been fully realised, but in which every person and all created things are called to share.

Paul's phrase thus synthesises two fundamental aspects: that man the Believer belongs both to heaven and to history. Heaven expresses his belonging to God in communion given by God Himself and accepted by man as gift; this belonging expresses the final and fundamental meaning of the life of man and his personal identity. It expresses the fact that the meaning of our existence is rooted in God and in our relationship with Him, who comes to meet us, loves us, calls us, and saves us. But, if waiting for the final and definitive coming of the Lord is, on the one hand, that history is called to find in Him its fullness of salvation, on the other it also says that our belonging in history as believers is fundamental.

History in fact becomes the space, time and the whole of experience in which we learn to know the Lord, to know ourselves in Him, to become capable of living communion with Him, with ourselves and with other men, in all its fullness and beauty. History is the great background against which we are called to fully develop our choices, our freedom, our intelligence, and our love, because in a responsible and mature way we learn to live in communion with God and with our fellow men, which is the purpose, the meaning, and the ultimate end of our existence according to the will of God. History is the space and the time of our becoming mature as believers, it is the space and the time for giving witness to faith.

To state that our homeland is in heaven does not in fact mean that history is undervalued or underappreciated; it does not mean that we flee from it. History, our own personal and our collective historical existence, is the precious experience in which we are called by God to know Him and to love Him, and we are at the same time called by Him to know and love each other. From the moment that we know and love God, and know ourselves and love ourselves in Him is eternal life of perfect communion to which God calls us, it derives that personal and collective history is for man the great school in which one prepares for eternity. Not only, but history and eternity are deeply interconnected: this life prepares us for eternity, because until that moment we are called to live our life starting from the fundamental reality that 'our homeland is in heaven'. History, then, is the way which leads us to God, if we welcome God into our life and live in communion with Him, in obedience to His will of love and justice.

All this, I hope, synthesises a theological framework for understanding the relationship between religion and civil society throughout history according to the Christian point of view, which will now be developed.

3) Religion and its relationship with the historical and social dimension.

Religion expresses the supernatural tension *existing in* man, his desire for the absolute and his search for the ultimate meaning of history and the universe. All religions express this tension and, in different ways, seek to teach man to live in a way which conforms to the ultimate meaning of reality which is God Himself, in order to find real truth.

The Christian faith holds that at the natural level man has this fundamental opening towards God, even if sin has rendered it more difficult to find the way to reach the truth which is God Himself. This is because God Himself, on His own free initiative, through His free love, has revealed Himself, has, that is, spoken with man, has made Himself known through Words and Events during the course of the story of salvation, in particular in His relationship with the Ancient Israelites. For the Christian faith this revelation reached its culmination in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God become man. But the Christian faith is also aware that everything that is true, good and holy in other religions comes from God and leads to God (cf. *Lumen gentium* 16; *Nostra aetate* 2).

According to Christian theology there is, therefore, a universal action of the grace of God which flows from the mystery of Christ and leads all men to Him; this action of grace is also present in all which is good, true and holy in other religions and is lived by their followers.

From this perspective, therefore, religions are called to develop a single and beneficial mission in the history of human society. The mission of the religions is that of recalling man to the truth of his existence, that is to the fact that to live one's own life in obedience to the truth which is God Himself, and to translate this obedience through real choices and historical actions. In Christianity there is a deep conviction that history and eternity are profoundly united, that God and man are in a profound reciprocal relationship. History is the account of the proof of this, but also the occasion of grace, per to live loving God through a life of intelligent and intense dedication towards one's brothers: whoever loves God also loves his brother, and he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 *Jn* 4, 20).

The studies in Comparative Religions demonstrate that all religions teach individuals how to live their relationship with God; but the same studies demonstrate that religions also teach individuals how to live their relationships with others and with themselves, and also teach them how to relate with social community and with history.

This common feature, shared by religions, has prime important consequence: religion always has a social expression and mission which is at the deepest part of its nucleus and identity. Religion does not offer purely individual solutions, but always places the individual in relation to others: God, other people, history. This is particularly evident in the Christian faith in which there is a continuous reference from God to men, from history to eternity, from the most intimate sphere of relationship with God to the stringent necessity of its historical expression in relation to real situations and real people. Jesus says that everything which is done to men is done to Him. (See *Mt* 25, 31-46; *Mt* 10, 40-42)

The reply offered by the Biblical revelation – which achieved its fullness in Jesus Christ – to the personal and global meaning of existence has a dimension of truth – believed as coming from God – which appeals to man's freedom, because he accepts this truth into his own life. And since man is a personal being, that is pre-eminently relational, the call of God to man always includes his relationships with other men. Each one of us is certainly destined to receive the call of God, His Word, in a very personal way – because each one of us in his or her deepest identity is a completely original and unique individual; but all of us are loved by God and all of us called by Him to listen and to communion. Relationship with God is always uniquely personal, but also profoundly communitarian. Our belonging to Him gives rise to our reciprocal belonging. The practice of our responsibility towards God comes through the practice of our responsibility towards the other men in our history. Love for God becomes real in our love for other men; sincere dedication to God is translated into the care which we show to other men and women. Because God loves us all together and in an absolutely personal way, and asks us to learn from Him and in Him how to

live an analogue tension of love, care and dedication, in which all our faculties are put into service: intellectual, affective, aesthetic, moral and spiritual faculties.

4) Religion and civil society

Religion therefore has an inevitable relationship with the historical and social dimensions of life. This relationship is part of the deepest and most basic identity of religion. Social life is, however, a complex system: within social life there are cultural, political and economic dynamics; social life itself is often organised giving institutional expression to these dimensions and dynamics which in turn structures social life. Social life is the space of pluralism: it is the area in which different cultural and religious currents find – or have to find – space to express themselves.

One important dimension of social life is political life, which supports the structure of the state and the various forms of government found therein.

But society cannot be reduced simply to the State: in this case one lives in a State which has very strong powers to intervene in all areas of social life. When the power of the State is very strong and controls all areas of social life the creativity of both groups and individuals is limited or blocked.

From the Christian theological point of view the best model for society is that in which there is a fertile balance between the State itself – which has clearly defined duties to govern and to guarantee civil order and *to pursue the* common good – and its society, seen as the result of a rich and variegated cooperation of initiative. We are talking here of initiatives which arise from the efforts of individual citizens, who associate themselves and express initiatives of different types: economic, cultural, religious, educational, caring services of various sorts – to give just a few examples. **These initiatives as a whole constitute the living tissue of civil society.**

Civil society is rich and vital when the State does not absorb into itself all the duties and prerogatives, but instead actively promotes creativity and associated entrepreneurial activities from which the so-called ‘intermediate bodies’ can arise, that is structures of a collective nature which are managed by the citizens themselves, within a basic institutional framework guaranteed by the State. This vision of society, which sees civil society as working alongside the State, does not see these two dimensions in competition, but rather in reciprocal dialogue. This vision affirms in a stronger way the centrality of man (and of the citizen) – with his creative capacity to give a morally adequate response to the challenges of history – with respect to **other visions of society** largely centred on the state institution as an organ of control and of direct action concerning various duties inherent to social life. The political vision which values civil society, and intermediate bodies between the State and its individual citizens, is a vision which appeals directly to individual conscience, placing them in reciprocal dialogue and promoting a reciprocal sense of responsibility and care. It is a vision which seeks to translate onto the political and social plane **the** responsibility which men have in relation to God and in their reciprocal relationship **within history.**

In this model a central role is taken by the principle of subsidiarity: this means that various initiatives organised 'from below' are called to respond to cultural, social, educational and economic needs of society, reserving only those things aimed at filling gaps and insufficiencies to the State, where initiatives at the basic level have not succeeded. The principle of subsidiarity states, in fact, that the highest institutional bodies must not do anything which can be done and managed by basic organisations. This principle gives much value to individual creativity and responsibility, and places man at the centre; **man is considered in his** capability to freely take up responsibilities before God and his neighbour, in a relational identity; at the same time the principle of subsidiarity limits the area of direct influence and management by the State. From it we derive a model of a more 'human' and less institutionalised society in the strictest sense of the terms (*a less centralized society, a society less directed from the top*). It is at the same time a model of a pluralist society, in which, within a shared civil order, creativity and plurality of cultural and religious expression find ample space to develop.

According to Christian social vision, civil society is in fact the privileged place where religion is able to organise itself, express itself, spread itself through society by means of its own structures and develop the social role expected of it.

But, this vision has also a consequence concerning the relations between religions and the State. Accepting the civil society as the privileged space for the fruitful expression of religions, also means that the principle of distinction between State and religions must be accepted. That means that religions belong to the sphere of civil society not to the sphere of the State institutions. The distinction of the two "order" is very clear in Christian tradition.

If, in fact, one religion decides to permeate society starting with the State and the state institutions, there is a high risk that pluralism within society will be limited or blocked by direct political power that a single religion **does express** by means of juridical and institutional apparatus.

So-called 'ethical states', where the predominance of a single non-religious ideology permeates a State and imposes an absolute vision of the State on its citizens in relation to their consciences, arise in a similar way. The expression of freedom of conscience at both the individual and the group level is prohibited.

A correct secularisation of the State is therefore meant as a positive value. A correct conception of secularisation certainly does not mean State hostility toward religion. On the contrary, a healthy secularism means that the state institutions do not identify themselves with a single religion or ideology, but are founded on a strong nucleus of shared values which find formal expression in the constitutional Charter and which safeguard the basic dignity of each citizen. On the basis of these values and this safeguarding, which is the basis for formal citizenship equal for all, the citizens can then express individually and in groups their own particular religious,

cultural and political allegiances, giving rise to a multiple expression within civil society in reciprocal dialogue within the framework of a shared context.

According to the Christian vision, this model of society is that most favourable to both the religious life of individuals and communities and to the role played by religion in public. **The fact of being autonomy from political institutions** allows religion to be fully itself: the positive influence of religion is always developed starting from free choice by individuals and communities, vastly diminishing every form of constriction including those due to social pressures. A real religious choice (and the choice of religion) is always a question of freedom.

On the other hand, to accept autonomy – in the sense of distinction – of political and religious institutions also means to accept the evident fact that in a given society people express a wide range of different cultural, religious and political positions; it means to accept that these different positions have the right to be expressed within the context of a shared civil order, which is based on equality of citizenship necessarily released from a specific religious allegiance.

It is clear that in the Christian vision religious allegiance should not have either positive or negative power to control the exercise of citizenship through the law. This, however, does not mean that personal religious allegiance does not contribute greatly to the way in which an individual carries out his responsibilities as a citizen. Religion, in fact, encourages its followers to be exemplary citizens as far as morals are concerned, to fulfil their duties for the benefit of all, and to build up an increasingly more 'human' society. But in this case the influence of religion is achieved by means of the coherence of the moral and religious lives of individuals and the associated initiatives to which they give rise, not through the juridical and institutional forms which determine the statute of citizenship for citizens.

On the other hand, religion, as active member of civil society, can be fully itself and act in an effective way in conformity to its own spiritual identity. By means of the many initiatives it promotes, religion witnesses in a capillary way the nearness of God, and reminds men to make a free personal response to this call. In this way religion is able to mould society or give it a precise character; in this way society can express its own religious tradition fervently, without, however, forcing this upon all its other citizens, without prohibiting religious pluralism, without impeding other contemporary cultures from expressing themselves. Civil society is truly the space where religion can witness creatively, when it is open to dialogue and close to man.

Italy would not be the country it is without the charitable initiatives of the Catholic Church, without all those churches in which the liturgy is celebrated, without all those many reminders of Christianity; but all these are real expressions of faith, in so far as they are experienced in dialogue with the whole of society: a dialogue which is developed not only with members of the other religions present,

but also with non-believers and with those whose religious life is fragile, to whom the Church does not impose, but proposes a real witness of faith.

According to Christian tradition a direct relationship of dependency between politics and religion, between the State and the Church, is risky for religion itself for two reasons. First, that religion becomes a necessary tool of political power, where logic is flawed and where, far too often, the needs of power are more important than the needs of the common good. Second, when a religion becomes strongly institutionalised in the State it loses much of its inner energy: for 'reasons of State', its interior cultural and reflective life is channelled in ways which always express the position of a minority, to the detriment of that pluralism that each religion bears historically within itself in the framework of a basic orthodoxy. To think that politics helps religion 'to be itself' is a dangerous idea, particularly for religion, which ends by being enslaved by a logic not its own, and finishes by ceding compromises at the level of fundamental religious values, such as the safeguarding of individual human rights, fundamental human freedom, and the refusal of violence and forcible domination.

The clear distinction between State and Religion can help religion to be itself, and resist becoming an instrument for worldly and political logic, which are even capable of using religion as an instrument means of violence.

From this point of view, Christianity has its own clear and specific contribution to offer: political power must never be confused with the saving power of God.

The Lord Jesus knowingly refused to be a political Messiah, even though many Jews of the time were expecting such a Messiah to arrive. He thus distinguished once and for all political praxis from the praxis of faith. This did not prevent Jesus from witnessing to the primacy of God in His life, of restoring mankind, of giving a new meaning to history. But Jesus did all this from the beginning by not using political power, but rather living a life of intelligent service to God in favour of mankind; a service which He lived with the whole of Himself and His existence.

According to the Christian vision, believers, both as individuals and as community, are called to live and develop an analogous service of witness to God and 'care' of fellow men. This service, to which the religions and their believers are called, finds a rich and fruitful space to express itself within civil society. This service, which is performed both by individuals and by groups, can also assume political shape (for example, militant party politics), but in this case always without the direct involvement of the religious organisation itself; and always only to assert more 'human' values for which consensus is sought in the widest context in society.

Christians live in the world among other men and are, and wish to remain, citizens just like other people. They are and must be responsible for the construction of the *polis* – of the earthly city, of society – along with other citizens: they are not allowed to desert this responsibility, to flee this world and take no interest in the evolution of civil life; on the contrary, they must play an intelligent, creative and

competent part in the realisation of an integrated society in which human values and quality of common life are paramount. And from the Christian point of view, this is the duty of all believers from all religions.

Because they possess this certain vision of the world and the people living in it, Christians hold convictions that cannot be relegated absolutely to the personal or private sphere, but which must be present in a pluralist society and heard in the public arena. Secularisation of the State does not mean that religion must be silent, but rather that the State guarantees it self-expression, even though other citizens are under no obligation to listen. True religion, by its very nature, cannot arise from coercion.

For Christianity the distinction between political authority and religious authority is clearly defined: this distinction protects religion from being used for political ends and never makes political power – which is always in the hands of men – a sacred object.

At the same time, the Christian view sees in civil society a space for positive influence between the Church – and other religions – and the institutional political dimension.

The Christian faith wishes to be able to contribute to the moulding of the social life and culture of all men: without claiming the right to a ‘political’ superiority with respect to the contribution of other philosophical, religious and ideological components, but aware of the importance and the moral duty of expressing its own convictions in the public sphere of civil society, and in the political sphere whose legitimate autonomy is accepted.

الإسلام والمجتمع المدني

والتبشير بعلاقة جديدة بين الإسلام والمسيحية

Islam and Civil Society

Towards a new relationship between Islam and Christianity

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الى مؤتمر الدين والمجتمع المدني

الذي ينظمه المعهد الملكي للدراسات الدينية والمجلس البابوي لحوار الأديان

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ويتأمل هذه الدراسات وغيرها نستخلص ما يلي:

- أولاً: أن هذه المؤسسات والمنظمات لا بد وأن تكون غير حكومية وأن تكون غير هادفة للربح.
- ثانياً: وأن أهدافها تنموية ودفاعية كما أشرنا.
- ثالثاً: أنها تشكل القوة الثالثة تجاة سلطات الدولة أو الحكومة من ناحية وتجاه قوى السوق وتكتل مصالحه الرأس مالية من ناحية أخرى.
- رابعاً: أنها اليوم قد تطورت بحيث لا تؤدي عملها في صورة فردية أو معزولة لكنها تؤدي رسالتها في شبكة مؤسسات متعاونة متآزره مما يمنحها القوة والفاعلية والتأثير بصورة لم يعرفها العالم من قبل.
- خامساً: قد يتجاوز التنسيق المحلية الى الإقليمية والعالمية ويعبر عن هذه الحالة بصيغة:

Transnational Civil Society

العلاقة بين الإسلام والمجتمع المدني:

إن دراسة هذه العلاقة تقتضي أن نرصدها في تعاليم الدين الإسلامي وتوجيهاته ومقاصده من جهة، وفي ممارسات المسلمين عبر تاريخهم الطويل وإلى اليوم، وفي أوطانهم الإسلامية الشاسعة ذات الخلفيات السياسية والاجتماعية والثقافية المتنوعة من جهة أخرى.

لو نظرنا إلى أهداف المجتمع المدني ورسائله نجد أن الدين الإسلامي بنصوصه وتعاليمه وروحه ومقاصده يشجع على وجود هذا النوع من الأنشطة والمؤسسات التي تسمى اليوم بالمجتمع المدني؛ لأن الأهداف التي يسعى المجتمع المدني إلى تحقيقها هي نفسها في غالب الحالات- التي يسعى الدين الإسلامي إلى تحقيقها للناس، مثل: أعمال الإغاثة وحل النزاعات وتعميق الشورى والديموقراطية، وتعزيز العدالة والمساواة، وحفظ حقوق الأقليات، وكشف الفساد ومحاربتة، والشفافية والدفاع عن المظلومين والمضطهدين، وحفظ حقوق الإنسان وتكريس حرمة الكرامة الإنسانية، وتفعيل المناشط التعليمية والبحثية والتنموية بعامة والمحافظة على البيئة، وتعزيز القيم الخلقية في مجالات التجارة والأعمال والطب والبيولوجيا، وملاحقة مجرمي الحروب وترسيخ مبادئ القانون الدولي ورعاية الأسرة كنواة للمجتمع الخ...

إن نصوص القرآن والسنة متواترة وقاطعة في توجيه الناس وحثهم واستنهاض هممهم وحفز طاقاتهم إلى تحقيق هذه الأهداف التي تشكل روح الإسلام أو روح رسالته، وليس المقام هنا مقام سرد النصوص القرآنية والنبوية لأنه أكثر وأعظم من أن تحصي.

أما دراسة أنشطة المجتمع المدني على مستوى الممارسة، أفصد ممارسات المسلمين عبر تاريخهم الطويل وإلى اليوم فإنها حاضرة لكنها متفاوتة من وطن إسلامي إلى وطن آخر، ومن مرحلة زمنية إلى أخرى، أو من دولة سياسية حاكمة إلى دولة أخرى.

لقد عرفت المجتمعات الإسلامية صنوف رائعة وعديدة ومتنوعة من الأنشطة التنموية للمجتمع المدني تعليمية وصحية واقتصادية واجتماعية وروحية الخ.. وهذا النوع من الأنشطة التنموية للمجتمع الذي انتشر في العالم الإسلامي كله قد تكفل به نظام الوقف endowment في الإسلام، وقد كان الوقف مدنيا شعبيا مستقلا عن سلطان الدولة ونفوذها ويعيدا عن المؤسسات الرأسمالية، يلبي حاجة المجتمعات من الخدمات التنموية التي تشتد الحاجة إليها، ولا تستطيع الحكومات القيام بها، أو لم تكن تعنى بها العناية اللازمة.

إن مؤسسة الوقف الإسلامي كانت تمثل مبادرات المجتمع المدني التنموية التي ابتدعت لها نماذج وصورا متعددة تدعو إلى الإشادة والتقدير. لقد كانت مؤسسة الوقف الإسلامي التي تمثل المجتمع المدني بامتياز تضطلع بنصيب أساسي في سد حاجات المجتمع الإسلامي التنموية. وقد ظهرت في المجتمعات الإسلامية جماعات منظمة لتدبير شؤون المهن المختلفة ورعاية أحوال منسوبيها مثل التجار والصناع والفلاحين الخ.. وهذه الجماعات المهنية هي التي تحولت بعد ذلك إلى النقابات التي ترعى مصالح منسوبيها كالمحامين والمعلمين والمهندسين الخ.. كما عرفت الممارسات في المجتمعات الإسلامية من

يقومون بمهام الصلح وانهاء الخصومات والمنازعات بين الناس، وقد نهض بذلك الوجهاء والأعيان وشيوخ القبائل والعلماء وشيوخ الطرق الصوفية، أما جماعات الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر وحفظ القيم وصيانة الأخلاق فقد شكلت ملمحا بارزا من ملامح المجتمعات الإسلامية بعيدا عن سلطان الدولة ونفوذها.

وإن نظام الحسبة والاحتساب في المجتمع الإسلامي الذي كان يؤديه متطوعون يشبه في الممارسات الحديثة ما تقوم به جمعيات وجماعات حفظ حقوق المستهلكين ومنع الغش وكشف الاحتكار والعبث بالأسواق.

أما الطرق الصوفية وشيوخ التصوف فقد كان لهم نور بارز في نشر الآداب والأخلاق وأعمال الخير والتكافل والإسهام في تنمية المجتمع روحيا واجتماعيا وذلك بحسب مكانة هؤلاء الشيوخ ومدى انتشار طرقهم الصوفية ونفوذها في المجتمع.

يمكننا القول أن جملة هذه الممارسات المدنية هي التي حفظت المجتمعات الإسلامية قوية مزدهرة وضمنت لها ديناميكية تنموية ذاتية، لأن الدولة أو الحكومة كانت تشغل نفسها غالبا بأمور الدفاع الخارجي وحفظ الأمن الداخلي أكثر من أي شأن آخر، وكانت تترك مهام التنمية لما سمي فيما بعد بالمجتمع المدني.

وإذا ما نظرنا إلى الوظيفة الثانية من وظائف المجتمع المدني المعاصر المتمثلة في الدفاع عن الحريات العامة والخاصة، ومراقبة حقوق الإنسان، ومدافعة الحكومات من التغول على المواطنين، والعمل على كشف الفساد السياسي والإداري والاقتصادي، وبحثنا عنها في ممارسات المسلمين ماضيا وحاضرا، وجدنا أن الحكومات -على الأغلب- لم تشجع مثل هذه الأنشطة من الأفراد أو الجماعات، وهذا أمر متوقع وإن يكن غير مقبول. ولقد كان بعض الأفراد من رموز المجتمع وبعض الجماعات تأخذ على عاتقها -أحيانا- مسؤولية القيام ببعض هذه المهام التي تبلورت اليوم في المجتمعات الحديثة، وغالبا ما كانت تصطدم بتلك الحكومات وتتعرض لملاحقتها ومنعها من أداء رسالتها.

هذا على مستوى الممارسة الفعلية، أما على مستوى تعاليم الدين فإن الإسلام كما أشرنا بوجه ويشجع المسلمين أفرادا وجماعات على القيام بمثل هذه الواجبات، وإن اعتبرها البعض من فروض الكفاية وليس من الفروض المتعينة على كل إنسان بغض النظر عن استطاعته ذلك من عدمها، ومعنى ذلك أن المجتمع كله يكون أنما ومذنبا إذا لم يكن قادرا على إفراز جماعة تؤدي هذا الدور وتحمل هذه المسؤولية التي تشكل أحد أهم مسؤوليات المجتمع المدني المعاصر. والملاحظ أن هذه الجهود التنموية والدفاعية كانت تتم بصورة فردية غير منسقة وهذا يقلل من كفاءتها في المجتمع الإسلامي.

ملاحظات:

- وعلى الرغم من هذه العلاقة الوثيقة بين مقاصد الإسلام ورسالة المجتمع المدني فإننا نلاحظ أن مؤسسات المجتمع المدني المعاصر ورموزه لا يستثمرون الطاقة الدينية في تحقيق خططهم واستراتيجياتهم في المجالات السياسية والاجتماعية والثقافية والحقوقية. وقد تبدو في بعض تصرفاتهم روح مستخفة بالعقائد الدينية، وهذا قد يكون مفهوما في المجتمعات الغربية تبعا لنشأة مفهوم المجتمع المدني في عصر التنوير في أوروبا، وقد كانت الروح العامة إذ ذاك متذمرة من الدين ساخطة عليه، منتقمة من رموزه فانطبع المجتمع المدني بهذه السمة الغير مكرثة بالدين، ومما يؤسف له أن هذه الروح مستمرة لدى البعض، ولا نعدم لها صدى لدى بعض رموز المجتمع المدني ومؤسساته في العالم الإسلامي، بل إن البعض قد ظن أن هناك جفوة أو عداوة بين الدين ومؤسسات المجتمع المدني، والحق كما أظهرنا من قبل- أن هذا الظن خاطئ ولا أساس له، لأن الشعور أو الضمير الديني هو الذي يمنح الطاقة الدافعة والحيوية لهذه المؤسسات، ونلاحظ أن مؤسسات المجتمع المدني التي تستثمر الوجدان الديني تحقق رسالتها بفاعلية وتميز تفوق به على غيرها من المؤسسات التي لا تهتم بالعامل الديني أو تحقر من شأنه.
- وإن الدين الإسلامي يرشد ويصوب مطالب المجتمع المدني حين تتسم بالانفلات والشطط في بعض الأحيان مثل ما حدث في مؤتمر الأمم المتحدة للسكان بالقاهرة ويكين. ولقد كان التعاون بين الأزهر والفاثيكان قويا ومشرفا من أجل تصويب مسار هذين المؤتمرين فيما يتعلق بأمور الزواج والأسرة.
- من البديهي أن مؤسسات المجتمع المدني لا تنهض ولا تقوى على أداء رسالتها النبيلة الا في ظل نظم حكم ديموقراطية، أما نظم الحكم الاستبدادية فإن مؤسسات المجتمع المدني قد لا يسمح لها بالتشكل من الأصل، أو يسمح لها شريطة أن تكون منظمات شكلية مينة تمثل غطاء أو ديكورا تجمل به النظم الشمولية وجهها القبيح. ومما يؤسف له أن أكثر نظم الحكم في العالم الإسلامي والعربي نظم شمولية استبدادية، وتأسيسا على ذلك فإن منظمات المجتمع المدني في العالم الإسلامي والعربي المعاصر ضعيفة هشة لا تستطيع القيام بواجباتها وتحقيق أهدافها ورسالتها النبيلة. ومما يؤسف له كذلك أن قوى الهيمنة السياسية والاقتصادية المتحكمة في عالم اليوم تساند هذه النظم الشمولية المستبدة وتحميها وتدللها وتشارك معها أدبيا وعمليا في سحق المواطنين وسلب حقوقهم وكرامتهم. وبما أن دولة المؤسسات الحديثة لم تنضج بعد في العالم

الإسلامي، فإن المجتمع المدني بكل أطيافه وتنوع مؤسساته ومنظماته ورموزه يعاني من ضعف دوره وعدم قدرته على أداء رسالته مقارنة بالمجتمعات الديمقراطية، وتبقى مؤسسات المجتمع المدني في العالم الإسلامي هشة لا فاعلية لها في الأغلب الأعم.

دور علماء الدين في التبشير بعلاقة جديدة بين المسلمين والمسيحيين،

والتعاون مع مؤسسات المجتمع المدني في تعزيز هذه العلاقة الجديدة:

لكي تبني هذه العلاقة الجديدة على أسس ثابتة، لا بد من ملاحظة أن القواسم المشتركة بين الإسلام والمسيحية كثيرة وجوهرية، كما أن الاختلافات عديدة وأساسية، وعلينا أن نتذكر أن من الحقائق الثابتة أن هذه الاختلافات باقية ومستمرة لأن بعضها يتعلق بالعقائد وبعضها يتعلق بالتشريعات والأحكام، وبها يكون الإسلام اسلاماً وتكون المسيحية مسيحية، وعلينا أن نعلن ذلك ولا نخفيه. ورغم كثرة المشتركات بين الديانتين فإن من يؤمن بالمسيحية هو كافر ببعض ما في الإسلام، وأن من يؤمن بالإسلام هو كافر ببعض ما في المسيحية. وتأسيساً على ذلك فإن علماء الديانتين لا يعفنون مثل هذه الاجتماعات، ولا ينظمون هذه المؤتمرات بغية الغاء هذه الاختلافات بين الإسلام والمسيحية، لكننا نجتمع لكي نتحاور من أجل البحث عن صيغ عملية لإدارة هذه الاختلافات إدارة ناجحة تحقق الحكمة الإلهية السامية التي جعلت التنوع والاختلاف هو السنة أو القانون العام للوجود كله وليس للأديان فحسب.

إن رسالتنا نبيلة وأهدافنا جليلة تتمثل في تقديم فهم جديد وصحيح لهذه الاختلافات والتنوعات الدينية بحسبانها مفيدة لإثراء التجربة الإنسانية الروحية وإغناء الثقافات البشرية، وأنها ينبغي أن تدفعنا إلى التعارف والتعاون والتعايش لا إلى الصراع والتخاصم وسفك الدماء وإزهاق الأرواح كما حدث وكما يحدث اليوم في مناطق كثيرة في العالم.

وأنجع حل ينبغي على قادة الأديان أن يعطوه ما يستحق من اهتمامهم هو نشر ثقافة التعددية الدينية religious pluralism، وهذا مجال خصص للتعاون بين علماء الأديان ومنظمات المجتمع المدني.

والتعددية الدينية التي أعنيها هنا ليست تلك التي يبشر بها البروفيسر جون هيك J. Hick ولا البروفيسر هانس كونج Hans Kung، ولكن التعددية التي نعنيها هي أن نؤمن أن الأديان المختلفة المتعددة لها الحق في الوجود جنباً إلى جنب، وأن الحكم على هذه الأديان لله تعالى وحده، وأن هذا الحكم سيكون يوم

القيامة وليس في هذه الحياة الدنيا، ولنتأمل الآيات القرآنية الكريمة التي تتحدث عن هذه التعددية الدينية وتؤكد هذه المعاني: ومنها قوله تعالى

(لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ) - سورة البقرة آية 256

وهذه التعددية الدينية تستلزم التمسك بقيمة مهمة يجب على علماء الأديان دعمها وتعميقها لدى أتباعهم أولاً ثم لدى المجتمع المدني؛ هذه القيمة هي حرية الدين أو حرية التدين. إن هذه الحرية منحة الله للإنسان فلا يسوغ أن تسلب منه، وإن من يشك في حرية التدين أو يحد منها أو يصادر لها يتطاول على الله تعالى ويفتنت عليه، ليس هو القاتل

(إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالْمَجْرِيَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ) - سورة الحج، آية 17

إن حرية التدين إذا جزء من الدين ذاته. وإن جميع ما يتعارض مع حرية الدين من أفكار وثقافات وأحكام وتدابير ينبغي توجيه المجتمع المدني إلى الجهاد من أجل الغائها وتحرير ارادة الإنسان لكي يمارس الحق الذي منحه الله له في اختيار ديانته وعقيدته بحرية كاملة دونما ضغط أو إكراه أو ارهاب.

تجديد الفكر الديني الإسلامي والمسيحي:

وأرى أن من أسس بناء علاقة جديدة بين الإسلام والمسيحية العمل على تجديد الفكر الديني وكذا تجديد الخطاب الديني على الجانبين، والتعاون مع مؤسسات المجتمع المدني في نشر هذا الفكر الجديد بين أتباع الديانتين الكبيرتين الذين يشكلون قرابة نصف سكان العالم.

ودعوني أذكر هنا بحقيقة واضحة يعقنها العالمون من المسيحيين والمسلمين، ألا وهي أن تفسير النصوص الدينية وكذا استنباط الأحكام وتكوين المواقف، وتشكيل الصور الذهنية والثقافية المتبادلة بين الجانبين جاءت في الأغلب الأعم نتيجة مواقف وظروف تاريخية معينة، قد تكون صراعات وخصومات وتنافسات سياسية أو اقتصادية، لكنها كانت تسوق العلماء على الجانبين إلى افراز تفسيرات للنصوص واستنباط أحكام تتسم غالباً بطبيعة الطرف المتوتر والوضع المحتقن، ثم تهدأ الأزمة وتبقى التفسيرات والأحكام والصور الذهنية السلبية للطرف الأخر، ثم تسكن في بطون الكتب والمراجع الدراسية وتتراكم وتشكل ثقافة عامة تعمق وتكرس سوء الفهم المتبادل الذي يتوارثه نصف سكان العالم؛ أعني اتباع

الديانتين، جيلا بين جيل، ثم تعيد وسائل الإعلام انتاجها والزيادة عليها مما يعمق الكراهية ويبعث على الخوف المتبادل ويضيع على الإنسانية المنهكة فرصا ثمينة للتفاهم والسلام والمحبة والتعايش.

يجب على علماء الأديان أن يعملوا مع قادة المجتمع المدني ومنظماته على التبشير بهذه الروحية الجديدة التي تعمل على تنقية الفكر الديني من السموم التي لوثته، والتي أنتجت ظروف غير سوية ثم انتهت الظروف وبقيت السموم حافزة ومشجعة على انتاج ظروفها من جديد، في سلسلة لا متناهية.

اقترح:

واقترح في هذا المقام تشكيل لجنة مشتركة من علماء الديانتين تعمل على تحقيق هذه الرؤية من ناحية، والتعاون مع المجتمع المدني في تفعيلها وترسيخها.